

TIKHON SYOMUSHKIN

*Alitet Goes
to the Hills*

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PART ONE



CHAPTER ONE

IT HAD BEEN quiet since the morning, and man's voice was carried far and wide. The sea was calm, rising and falling in a gentle swell.

Towards evening a boisterous north wind sprang up. The sea grew rough. Its waves steadily mounted, their boom and roar re-echoing among the hills. The people of the Enmakai settlement had come down to the seashore to meet the hunters from the walrus grounds.

Intently scanning the stormy sea they hailed each other in loud, anxious voices. Their bulky fur-clad figures stood out sharply against the white background of the snow, which had not yet melted in these parts. The wind strengthened. Huge billows crashed down on the beach, where they broke and receded in seething foam.

"Alitet! Alitet! Alite-et!" a boy standing on the cliff suddenly shouted in a piercing voice.

He kept on shrieking, pointing towards the sea, proud of the fact that he had been the first to espy Alitet.

The sail of a whaleboat hove in sight on the skyline. It appeared riding high on the crest of the wave to

vanish again, plunged into the black chasm. All talk had ceased. Old Vaal, the great hunter, hobbled towards a group of excited women. He was clad in a threadbare deerskin parka neatly girded with a seal thong. His stern face, marked with deep-furrowed lines of bitterness, wore an air of equanimity and worldly wisdom. All this old man's life had been spent on the sea. He had looked death in the face many a time, and people respected his word.

Peering with rapidly blinking eyes at the stormy sea, he said gravely and knowingly:

"It is not dangerous to sail in a whaleboat in a rough sea—she is made of wood and has a proper keel...."

And cupping together his shrivelled hands he showed how the keel was shaped.

"Now the flat-bottom skin boats are bad in a rough sea. They are likely to capsize."

The old man spoke of things that were familiar to everybody, but people nevertheless listened to him attentively and with special deference. Now and then the women stole anxious looks seawards. They all knew that the hunters took extra precautions in such weather by tying inflated seal bladders to the sides of their boats. Nevertheless they were unable to suppress a feeling of anxiety for their husbands.

Far out at sea the skin boats, too, came in sight, bare specks in the distance, bobbing up and down on the waves.

The whaleboat raced towards the shore in full sail. Its keel cleaved the waves, drawing nearer and nearer. The huge sail caught every gust of wind.

When the whaleboat drew close to the shore the sail dropped, covering the carcasses of the walruses on the deck.

On the bow stood the stocky figure of Tumatuge, the hunter. He held in his hand a long thin thong coiled up

in a little hoop and kept a watchful eye on the waves, making ready to cast it ashore. The boat reared high on the waves, but Tumatuge stood poised with his feet firmly planted, balancing his body to the lurching of the vessel. His head was bared. His clothes dripped with the dashing spray. The hunters sat in the whaleboat tensely watching the breakers.

As the boat was thrown up on the crest of a huge wave Tumatuge flung the coil ashore with a powerful sweep of the hand, but it was carried back by the receding wave.

The boat rocked on the surge for a long time, controlled by the crew's oars. And many times did Tumatuge ineffectually throw his line.

Old Vaal sat apart, puffing at a big wooden pipe and watching the whaleboat. Suddenly he swiftly threw off his torbazes,* tucked up his trousers, and, snatching a coil similar to that of Tumatuge's out of a boy's hand, he ran down to the water's edge. And after a huge wave had receded he plunged in after it with the speed and agility of a youth. With a strong sweep the old man deftly threw the coil around Tumatuge's neck, then spun round and raced back with still greater speed to avoid a new oncoming wave. He dropped onto the snow, panting. The women rushed to help him on with his boots.

"Plenty of strength but not enough skill," said Vaal, nodding with a smile towards the hunters.

The people standing on the shore pulled in the tow-line from the whaleboat. The old man got up. He stood calmly and attentively watching the breakers, counting them.

The people took hold of the line, casting glances at the old man and waiting for his command.

* Moccasins—skin boots.—*Trans.*

The hunters ceaselessly plied their oars to keep the boat from rising on the crest of a big wave before time.

The old man let several big breakers pass, crying out to the people to keep a tight hold on the line. Suddenly Vaal sprang into the air and shouted with all his might: "To-hok!"

The people on shore instantly threw their weight on the line and hauled in the boat with cries and clamour. The breaker dashed itself on the beach and swept back, leaving the whaleboat grounded in the snow.

A short, thickset man with a muscular neck jumped swiftly out of the boat. His weather-beaten face with its high cheekbones was almost brown. Darting black eyes in narrow slits glittered beneath an American celluloid eyeshade which he wore as a protection against the sun. True, the sun had long since disappeared behind the clouds, but Alitet never parted with his shade—he had a predilection for things American. His bare head was framed by a crop of black, lank hair, as stiff and bristly as whalebone. It covered his ears and almost the whole of his forehead. The crown was a shining patch shaved clean to the skin. Alitet's face and the whole of his stocky figure bespoke strength, tenacity and cruelty. He was dressed in a sealskin jacket girded by a long oil-lamp wick in place of the usual seal-hide thong. From this girdle hung numerous charms in the shape of bits of hide, a red bead, a miniature bone engraving of a walrus and a twenty-cent coin. The whaleboat, too, was bedecked with a variety of charms. They were a protection against evil spirits, calamities, and sickness, and brought luck in life and trade. Alitet's heart was cheered by the successful outcome of the walrus hunt.

"There are no walruses close by!" he told his tribesmen who clustered around him. "The walrus swims far from shore. Way there, far away!" and Alitet made a sweeping gesture towards the sea.

He turned to the whaleboat and rapped out in a stern voice:

"Hi, you there! Drag the boat clear of the waves! Have you gone blind—the mark will get washed off!"

The mark was the date "1916" drawn on the boat's side in black paint. The American who had sold Alitet the whaleboat had painted it with his own hand. Alitet had touched up the mark once a year for four years, until the figures "1916" had now become "1016." This token of good luck, which had laid the foundation for a life of prosperity, Alitet guarded with superstitious care.

"Get the boat out of the way, hurry up!" he bawled at the top of his voice.

The men scrambled about the boat and dragged it over the hard snow. There was a lot of meat in the boat—the flesh of three walruses. On top of the bloody carcasses lay eleven walrus heads with long curved tusks.

Tumatuge took the biggest head by its tusks and lifted it out over the side with difficulty. He thrust it with the tusks in the snow. Soon the snow around the whaleboat was saturated with blood. Tumatuge pulled out the eleventh head and placed it in line with the rest. The whiskered heads of the walruses with big open eyes stood in a row in the snow looking almost alive.

Alitet knows that his friend the Merican requires only the tusks! The meat could be thrown back into the sea. Besides, the boat could not carry more than three walruses.

The women, with their children perched on their shoulders, stood at the water's edge. They chewed sea cabbage and gazed silently and intently at the boats out at sea.

"No, the walruses are far away! The boat hunters did not make a single kill," said Alitet with a self-satisfied smile. "My whaleboat is strong and swift, like a

reindeer. The walrus cannot escape me. She is worth the six polar bear skins and the two sacks of white and red fox skins I gave Charlie for her, not counting the heap of walrus tusks I threw in extra!" Alitet made a deprecatory gesture towards the sea, adding: "Going out for game on a skin boat is just the same as chasing a fox without a rifle."

Old man Vaal went up to the walrus heads, eyed them sadly and said:

"How much meat wasted! How much food lost! Eight whole walruses! Good food thrown into the sea."

"The Merican would not bring me a bad whaleboat," said Alitet, paying no heed to the old man, and stepped over to where the walrus carcasses had been dumped.

The dogs had flocked here from all over the settlement. They sat around docilely in a semi-circle, their intelligent eyes fixed on the carcasses, licking their chops. They betrayed occasional signs of impatience by protracted whines and snappings. The less patient gobbled up chunks of blood-soaked snow.

There had not been any meat for a long time. With the cessation of the sledge trail the dogs were no longer fed. Emaciated and mangy-looking, with tufts of fur hanging down their flanks, they prowled about the settlement, fighting viciously over thrown-out bones. Dogs ran away into the tundra, turned wild and lived on marmots and ground squirrels. Alitet's dogs alone were in fine fettle. Alitet was fond of good dogs.

One hound, succumbing to the ordeal, made a dash for the meat.

"Guit! Wait your turn! I, too, am waiting patiently for a bit of meat," shouted Vaal and drove it off with his crutch.

The dog leapt weakly aside and looked sulkily at the old man.

Alitet, with narrowed eyes, was examining a big wal-

rus head. He pulled the tusks out of the snow, turned the head round and measured the tusk with his right hand.

"Fine tusks. There'll be twenty pounds in each."

None of the hunters had any idea of this "pound," or for that matter of any measures of weight. Alitet, who had constant dealings with Charlie, was the only one who knew perfectly well what a pound was.

Charles Thompson, the owner of the fur trading post, had chosen Alitet as his agent and had taught him, for the fun of the thing, to weigh walrus tusks on English scales.

And Alitet now spoke of pounds merely for the sake of showing off his knowledge in such an important matter and letting people know what a well-versed man he, Alitet, was. Narrowing his shifty eyes, he said:

"Dogs cannot understand a man's speech. Neither can our people understand what a pound is. But I know what a pound is!"—and Alitet laughed triumphantly, baring his strong white teeth.

"No, Alitet," said old man Vaal, shaking his head, "you should not laugh. Dogs do understand a man's speech. But they don't want to talk to him. That's what I think," ended up the old man soberly.

Alitet scowled at him.

"What are you talking about, old man? Have you left your wits in your yarang*?"

Vaal, after a moment's silence, blinked and said didactically:

"Every head, Alitet, is a source of understanding. Both man and beast, and even the little bird—all have understanding. If our people sold tusk to Charlie Red Nose themselves, and not through you, they, too, would know what a pound is."

* A native tent dwelling made of skins.—*Trans.*

"Why do you call him Red Nose? Don't you know he does not like it?"

"You cannot call a red fox white. He is what he is," said the old man. Whereupon he picked his way carefully and unhurriedly towards the women.

Alitet glared after him, spat and joined the hunters. They had already laid the walrus heads on a sledge, harnessed themselves to it in single file and were dragging it off to Alitet's yarang.

Without waiting for the hungry people's requests Alitet cried:

"Let each man take a piece of meat into his yarang! Everyone needs food. The boat hunters will not bring in meat all the same. So let me feed the people!" and turning to old Vaal, he shouted after him: "And you say the men should sell to the Merican themselves. Do not the people get help from me? Why, if they trade with the Merican themselves he will cheat them. But he cannot cheat me."

"The Merican is an old friend of yours," returned the old man.

Shouldering the chunks of meat the men joyfully went off with them to their yarangs. Everybody was in a happy mood. No wonder! Meat from the first spoil! And the hunting season had only just begun.

The boats approached the shore.

"Stop!" suddenly shouted Alitet. "Never mind the meat now—come and help the boats in."

The men obediently dropped the meat and ran towards Alitet. He was "the lord of the land"—the master of the settlement, and the people were accustomed to obey him without demur. Alitet's power and prestige were known up and down the coast and even in the depths of the tundra where dwelt the nomad reindeer herders, the Chauchu.

The boats, with sails made of old sackcloth, had

approached the shore. One boat was submerged in the water up to the gunwale. Six inflated seal bladders flapped on the water like the paws of some fabulous beast, keeping the boat afloat. The fur-clad hunters sat waist-deep in the waterlogged boat. They calmly and sedulously plied their oars to keep themselves warm and prevent the craft from being cast ashore until the line was thrown. Four boys stood on the beach ready to catch the coil.

Vaamcho, the son of old Vaal, threw the line three times, but it fell short of the shore. Wet Vaamcho stood up in the boat, knee-deep in the water. The sea gurgled beneath the soft bottom of the skin boat. Old Vaal began to take his boots off. Just then Vaamcho jumped onto the gunwale and flung in the line.

The old man bided his time, then shouted again:

"To-o-hok!"

The boat was beached. The hunters, all dripping wet, jumped out of it. The water streamed out through a hole in its bottom and the air bladders hung limp from its sides.

"The walrus skin is old," said old Vaal with a sigh. "It should have been changed this summer, but there were no skins."

Soon the boats were all ashore. They were empty. They had brought in one seal between them. The killing season had begun inauspiciously for the boat hunters.

"We would not taste fresh meat if not for Alitet," said Tumatuge.

CHAPTER TWO

Narginaut, a large woman tattooed all over her face, busied herself untying the wet thongs of her husband's torbazes. Alitet lay on his back, studying his wife in silence.

Narginaut took off his torbazes and fur stockings, drew off the top pair of sealskin trousers that tightly encased his legs and thrust them behind the ceiling beam to dry.

Alitet, half-naked, clad only in thin underpants of reindeer calfskin with the hair inside, squatted on a downy reindeer pelt. His broad chest, powerful neck and muscular arms testified to his extraordinary physique. Indeed, there was not a man on the whole coast who could get the better of him in a wrestling bout. Alitet was fond of wrestling and often made men accept his challenge by force. There were men on the coast who had been maimed by him. And now, sitting in the polog,* he stroked his powerful muscles, as though preparing for a coming bout.

Alitet's fur polog was spacious. Three burners** supplied plenty of light and warmth. Over the burners hung kettles and a pot of fresh walrus meat. Suspended from the rafters were various charms of sea beasts, fish and miniature human figures. One charm was so black with age that it was difficult to say what it was—dog, fox, wolf or bear.

The charms safeguarded the yarang against evils and calamities.

On a wooden box by the front wall stood a shining nickel alarm clock of American make. Judging by the time it registered, it, too, did duty as a charm, fostering good trade relations with the American.

On a pile of reindeer skins, next to the burners, sat the stark-naked flabby figure of the ancient Korauge, the

* A section of the yarang partitioned off with reindeer skins, usually six by twelve metres in size and the height of a man, which serves as living quarters for the Chukchi family.—*Trans.*

** Here, a wooden or steatite bowl filled with blubber, the flame of which, the wick being of moss, serves as fire and light.—*Trans.*

shaman, Alitet's father. A long straggling beard the colour of ash lay on his sunken, creased chest. A fine reindeer calfskin lay on his skinny knees, as though stretched on two sticks. Shaman Korauge was repairing a drum, to the rim of which he was fastening the dried bladder of a walrus.

"Yester eve I beat the drum a very long time. My arms got tired and the drum broke. But I turned away the wrath of the spirits," said Korauge in a quavery voice. "That is why you fell in with so many walruses."

"What you say is true, father. You lured the walruses to my boat," confirmed Alitet.

Flattered by the admission, Korauge sniggered through his closed mouth, picked up a little whalebone rod and scratched his back with it, grunting with sensual delight. Then he passed the rod to his grandson and said:

"Here, get you busy with my back, Goi-Goi, while I listen to Alitet."

The boy fell to with a hearty good will.

Lying prone on the skins like a walrus on the ice, with his hands folded under his head, Alitet narrated at length the story of his hunt. When he had finished Korauge observed:

"There, you see, I am endowed with a great power. The power of the spirit. I can command the sea beasts."

"Father, I shall tell the hunters of your power. Let them know it!"

Narginaut placed a large wooden bowl containing walrus meat in the middle of the floor. Steam rose from the meat and the smell teased the appetite. The household moved up to the food. Narginaut deftly cut up the tough meat and whale blubber of the previous year's stocks. Bending over the bowl she slashed off thin, hard slices of whale blubber. Alitet snatched them from under the knife and swallowed them without chewing.

Now and then Narginaut would swiftly throw a piece into her own mouth and resume her manipulations with the knife.

The neighbour Tumatuge crawled into the yarang. He hastily shed his parka, rolled it up into a bundle and squatted down on it. He attacked the food without waiting for an invitation.

Following the snack of whale blubber everyone fell greedily upon the walrus meat. It was fresh and savoury meat of the first killing. Digging their teeth into the tough meat the eaters cut off pieces close to their lips with a sharp knife and swallowed them. The only sounds in the yarang were a loud munching and the clatter of the hostess' knife on the wooden bowl.

After the meal everyone licked his greasy fingers and wiped his mouth with dried grass.

"Now give us tea," said Alitet to his wife. "With sugar. Let Tumatuge drink tea like a real man. He shot well at the walruses. He killed nine of them out of eleven."

Tumatuge smiled, passed his hand over his perspiring face, and, addressing himself to Korauge, began his narration:

"We went far out to sea. We rowed all day without resting—there was no wind. There were many walruses there."

"I drew them thither by the beatings of my drum," the shaman broke in.

"Yes, you speak truly, Korauge, there was a lot of walruses. The boat hunters did not reach that spot. They only came across one. When they killed the walrus and laid the meat in the boat the bottom burst from the weight. We passed them at the time but did not stop to help. We saw them hasten to throw the killed walrus back into the sea."

"Help is taboo. The wrath of the spirits might have

been turned against the whaleboat. The spirits are all-powerful and the ordinary mortal is impotent against them, as the tundra mouse is impotent against the wolf. You have acted rightly," admonished the shaman.

"My aim was very good this time," Tumatuge went on excitedly. "As soon as the walrus showed its head the bullet from my rifle hit it where I sent it."

"And whose rifle is it?" broke in Alitet. "Did you not get the rifle from me? There is not another rifle like it on the coast. It is a Winchester—the very best. So Charlie told me. I paid him eight white foxes, three red fox skins and twenty young reindeer skins for it."

"There were ten young reindeer skins, Alitet. I put them on the sledge myself," rejoined Tumatuge timidly.

"No, twenty," said Alitet sternly.

"I must be bad at counting, Alitet. But then I am no trader. How am I to know?" faltered Tumatuge.

"I threw in twenty young reindeer skins extra. Charlie told me that rifle is called 'savage' and it never misses."

The huge copper kettle was empty by now. Korauge the shaman heard out the hunters' stories attentively and said:

"O! I am a big shaman. I have been of great service to my people. I am on good terms with the spirits. The whole settlement lives under my protection. I heal reindeer, I heal men, I drive away the evil spirits from our settlement. Of all men Vaal alone does not want to know this. He is a trashy old man. Yet in luring the walrus to our shores I take care of him, too. Alitet always gives a piece of meat to his yarang as well."

"True, true, Korauge! Each yarang needs three walruses for the winter. But can they kill three walruses each in their leaky boats? They cannot. Alitet helps everybody," said Tumatuge ingratiatingly.

"Yesterday, when I beat my drum, the spirits told

me: 'There will be walruses.' I heard that as plainly as I hear the dogs howling in the night. And I said to Alitet: make ready the whaleboat, get ready the men. And so you went forth. And you killed eleven walruses in one day."

Sitting open-mouthed, with his head resting on his knees, Tumatuge threw awed glances at Korauge. Never had his faith in the shaman's miraculous powers been so strong.

Narginaut went outside. She set about dressing the walrus skins. They had a thick layer of fat on them, and that fat had to be removed at once. The skins were those of big beasts and Alitet would no doubt want to sell them to the Chauchu nomads.

Narginaut was worn out from her numerous domestic tasks. At times she wondered: "Why must they kill so many waldruses? We do not need so much food." Neither could she understand when Alitet said: "The more skins in the yarang, the more lively spirit there is in a man."

Narginaut's aching arms had barely had time to rest when she had to begin scraping these huge skins again. And tomorrow Alitet would bring more.

"Work, work!" Alitet would say to her. "Do the women in other yarangs drink tea with sugar? But you do. Because you live in my yarang. I, Alitet, am just the same as the Merican. So Charlie told me."

CHAPTER THREE

Winter. Twenty-four hours of night. The moon had not yet been born. All was blackness. The sun never made its appearance at this time of the year, and men thought that the sun moved somewhere beneath the earth, beneath the ocean. And it would not be coming back soon.

There was a raging blizzard. The yarangs creaked and shivered. The blizzard ran riot, shrieking and roaring like a wounded beast.

The dogs dozed, curled up with their muzzles hidden under their bellies, and did not seem to be taking the slightest notice of the wild elements.

In the yarang of old man Vaal the stock of blubber had run out. The dry moss in the burner burnt low and smoked. Inside the polog it was dark and cold. Its inhabitants huddled under shabby old skins, munching the remains of frozen raw seal flesh.

Here, too, in a corner lay Chegit, the favourite dog. Chegit twitched his tail and watched the people crunching meat through his half-closed eyes.

Old Vaal threw him a small piece. Chegit leapt to his feet and hungrily bolted it. He opened his eyes wide and gazed at the old man in expectation of another piece.

Vaamcho, who was gnawing a bone, glanced at Chegit out of the corner of his eye. He felt sorry for the hungry dog. He turned the bone about in his hand, then, after a little reflection, flung it to Chegit.

The dog caught the bone in mid-air and retired with it into a corner, whence there soon proceeded the sound of crunching.

Old Ilineut, Vaamcho's mother, removed the wooden bowl and lit her pipe. She held the big wooden pipe in her shrivelled hand, gazing impassively at the flame with faded eyes. When she had smoked herself dizzy she passed the pipe to her son who lay stretched out on the skins. Vaamcho got up and finished the pipe, squatting on his haunches.

The silence was broken by old Ilineut:

"It is bad without fat. Go to Alitet, Vaamcho. He gives everybody. The blizzard will last a long time. And you cannot go hunting in a blizzard."

Old Vaal cleared his throat and began slowly, reluc-

tantly as it were, to clean out the pipe. He filled it in silence, and, without looking at his son, said in a husky voice:

"A wife is a source of bother. Go, Vaamcho. Give him the white fox. The sight of a fox skin always puts him in a good humour. The fluffy fur of the little beast tickles his nostrils. Maybe we shall trap some more."

The old man sighed and added:

"The fox skins should really be saved up to buy a rifle with. Without a good rifle a hunter is not a man. But what can you do? A rifle is of no use to an enfeebled man. Without light and warmth a man is like a seal without air."

"The marrow dries in the bones—there is no food," said Ilineut.

Old Vaal pulled at the pipe, blew out a cloud of smoke and, clearing his throat once more, went on:

"I have been silent for many winters. I have kept my tongue in a leash. Now my tongue is eager to speak. It no longer listens to reason."

"Speak, father. Tell your son," said Vaamcho, putting on his torbazes.

Vaal was silent, making up his mind. At length he lowered his head, and, without looking at anybody, began in a low voice:

"It was a long time ago. Unhappy were my eyes then. They saw Alitet collecting white foxes from other men's traps. That is very, very bad! It is unc customary among our people. My eyes felt sick. Wild words struggled in my throat, but I . . . I said nothing then. It was easier to say nothing than to speak." The old man's voice had dropped to a whisper. "I hid myself behind a mound, so that Alitet should not see me. I was ashamed that my eyes had seen this. And soon afterwards, Korauge, too, deceived all the hunters of the settlement. The red and white fox skins that had been brought to him as sacri-

fices were discovered in Alitet's possession. I recognized my white fox and those of other hunters when Alitet exchanged them for Charlie's whaleboat. The little black nose of the fox was clipped as only I clip it. That was my fox skin! I would know it among the multitude of fox skins in the warehouse of Charlie Red Nose. Our fox skins went to pay for the whaleboat. Now the whaleboat has become Alitet's helpmate, and we must carry our skins to him again. So that is the news," said the old man, his head shaking tremulously. "But it is all the same, Vaamcho. Go to Alitet. Ask him for walrus fat and meat with which he feeds his dogs."

Vaamcho tore off his torbazes and said sharply:

"No, father! I shall not go to him. My legs will not take me. I will better dress myself now and go out in the blizzard, among the ice packs, to lie in wait for a seal."

Vaamcho's black eyes blazed.

"Vaamcho," the old man said gently, "in a gale like this there are no seals. Have you forgotten? Your young blood runs hotly even in the cold. But Ilineut is freezing. Go, Vaamcho! Forget what I have told you about Alitet. Do not remember evil. And beware of Korauge the shaman. You have a long time to live. They do not like us as it is. We should not rouse their anger too often."

Vaamcho began putting his boots on in silence.

The old man swallowed some smoke and continued:

"And the Tangs* with their fire guns have scared away the game. The seal rookeries are dying out. Now less and less game comes ashore. Before the walruses used to sleep soundly on the beach. We walked on their backs and they did not hear our footfalls. We speared only the old bulls. And now the quarry is killed at random. How much meat Alitet has thrown into the sea during the summer! Charlie Red Nose needs only the

* White men.—*Trans.*

tusks. But tusks are not food." The old man took a puff at his pipe. "In my young days I was skilful at spearing walruses—struck straight in the heart!" and Vaal brandished his pipe like a harpoon.

The shadow of a smile crossed his deeply furrowed face for a fleeting instant. During the summer Alitet had brought in from the sea over sixty walruses. And how many had been thrown overboard!

The blizzard had lashed itself into a frenzy. There could be no question of going out to hunt the seal. Many of the hunters had visited Alitet these days. To each Alitet gave a chunk of meat and some blubber. He held that men should not be allowed to die of starvation. Men should be helped. He could not do without them.

Vaamcho, too, returned from him with meat and fat.

Replenished with fat the moss burnt up in a broad tongue of flame that lit up the dark chill polog. Life returned to the yarang. How pleasant a warm light dwelling is! Ilineut brightened up and became busy. Soon the water was on the boil. The old woman poured out hot tea for everyone. But Vaamcho stared gloomily at the burner from which the heat emanated.

"Why is there sorrow in your eyes, Vaamcho? See, we have fire now," said Ilineut.

"Alitet asked me for my dog Chegiti. His words seared my heart. I said—no. Am I not a hunter too? He was angry. And I have heard some more news, father," said Vaamcho with great emotion. "Do you remember, father, I set traps for white foxes by the Three Hills? It is a very good spot. I took down a lot of bait. But I never caught a single fox. The bait lay untouched. It gave off a bad smell. How came there such a bad smell in the tundra—I could not understand. But just now, when Narginaut was giving me fat and meat, she dropped a bottle. The bottle broke. Stinking water poured out of it. Here, smell it, father, some of it got on my hands."

Vaamcho held his hand out to his father's nose, and the old man averted his head with a grimace of disgust.

"That is Tang lamp fat.* Charlie Red Nose pours it into his iron lamp. Can it be that Alitet had poured this evil-smelling fat over our bait?" queried the old man in astonishment. "If so, he is an utterly bad man."

"It is the same smell. One cannot mistake that evil smell," said Vaamcho.

The old man heaved a sigh.

This masculine conversation passed the woman's ears unnoticed. Ilineut was busy with her own affairs. She picked up the slop tub to carry it out. But she had barely opened the outer door when a fierce gust of wind tore the tub out of her hands and sent it rolling away from the yarang. The old woman ran after it and was lost in the darkness.

Ilineut did not come back to the yarang. The wind howled and tore at the roof. It seemed to lift the whole snow layer off the ground, whirling it into the air and sweeping it off seawards with a din and roar. The boat, which was securely lashed to its stakes, was wrenched from its moorings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alitet, after a hearty breakfast, was lying on a bed of downy reindeer skins. His son, Goi-Goi, sat astride his bare belly. The boy was laughing merrily, throwing occasional glances at his mother. Narginaut was pouring out a strong and fragrant brew of Lipton's tea. It was stuffy in the polog. The dark, naked bodies glistened in the bright light of three burners like the glossy skins of walruses.

* Kerosene.—*Trans.*

Korauga the shaman sat dozing. Striving to keep awake in anticipation of tea, he would suddenly start out of his nap, then drop off again into a nodding drowsiness.

"Charlie runs very, very fast... Charlie is the lead dog," Alitet was telling his son about his sledge dog.

Alitet was very fond of that intelligent hound and had named him after Mr. Thompson out of a sincere regard for his friend the Merican.

"No one has a dog like that. No one but me."

Alitet blew out his belly and rose on his elbows. Goi-Goi tumbled off onto the skins, and, laughing, scrambled like a bear cub back onto his father.

The head of Tumatuge's wife was thrust into the polog.

"You have come?" Narginaut greeted her.

"Yes," answered the woman. "All our fat has run out. Tumatuge is lying ill, and it is cold in the yarang."

"Father, you must invoke the healing spirits. We must help Tumatuge. He is the best hunter," said Alitet, but the shaman was fast asleep.

"Narginaut, give her a piece. Let her have light, so that she may sew torbazes and slippers. When the second moon comes I shall journey to the nomad herders and the Merican," said Alitet, moving up to the steaming tea together with the skin on which he sat. "Only you must sew good slippers. The Merican himself is going to wear them."

The woman nodded her head violently by way of assent and disappeared in the wake of Narginaut.

Shaman Korauga awoke and also drew up to the little table.

"How many people I feed!" exclaimed Alitet.

"Very many," confirmed Korauga hoarsely. He rubbed his eyes with a deerskin and asked for tea. "You, Alitet, are too generous with your help. You must hus-

hand your stocks. There is a shortage of meat on the coast. Stocks are a great power."

A sudden violent gust of wind shook the tent. Everybody looked up startled.

"A very big, strong storm. I must ask the spirits to stop it," said the shaman with a glance at his drum. "Let men go out to hunt. They have become greedy from idleness. They will devour all your stores."

Narginaut came in.

"Give them a little at a time," ordered Alitet. "Let them ask more often. That is what I think. That is what Charlie told me. And Vaamcho—not a piece more. Let him come to his senses. Even if he wants to give me the dog now I will not take it. The man is mad! What does he want with one good dog? It is only having a hard time among those trashy mongrels of his."

"You have forty-three dogs, Alitet. What do you want Vaamcho's dog for? He has so very few," said Narginaut and quailed at her own temerity.

"What is that my ears hear?!" hissed the shaman. "Or have you become a teamster that you speak of dogs? Or has your tongue learnt to discuss the affairs of men?"

"A lot of feed is needed for the dogs," murmured Narginaut.

"Feed is not the care of your hands. All the same meat goes on the side. Or are you tired of feeding my dogs? Eh?" snarled Alitet. "Every woman looks with envy upon the fullness of your work. Tell me, father, if your mind agrees, do I speak rightly or do I not?"

"You are the son of Korauge. You always speak rightly."

Pleased with the compliment, Alitet smiled. He stroked the muscles of his arm, then suddenly demanded:

"Why should I not take myself one more wife?"

"He cannot take a second wife who is unable to provide one with food. You can feed many wives and

all their children. You are no weakling. You feed four dog-teams!" proudly quoth the shaman, waving his skinny arm.

Alitet eyed his wife triumphantly.

"Eh? Narginaut? Is that clear?"

"Your mind," she answered meekly.

"You have grown clumsy in your old age. You do not manage to look after the household."

And Alitet spoke a long time with his father about the ways and means of multiplying his riches, about buying a herd of reindeer and about his trading with the nomads and the Mericans.

In the evening, when all were preparing for sleep, the drum started throbbing and twanging. The shaman chanted:

"My people have not left their yarangs for many days....

"My people must go out after the seal....

"Alitet is tired from helping them....

"Wind, go away!...

"Korauge himself asks it...."

"Guit, guit! Kaiva, kaiva!" ejaculated Alitet, encouraging the shaman.

Korauge beat his drum in a frenzy and screeched hysterically, appealing to the spirits.

The north wind subsided. It sped into the hills, deep into the Chukotsk range, but the loud cracking noises of the pack ice could still be heard out at sea.

The hunters crawled out of their stuffy pologs and clustered around the yarang of Vaal.

"She went out with the tub and...did not come back," the old man was saying, spreading his hands. "We searched in the night."

The old woman was found in the morning among the pack ice, at the very edge of the cliff. She sat against an ice block, with her head between her knees. Vaamcho

touched her on the shoulder, and the frozen body toppled over.

Nearby, within ten paces, the rim of the tub peeped out from under the snow.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fiery red orb of the moon crept out from behind the mountain ridge and mounted swiftly into the sky. At times it was overcast, and then the stars shone out more brightly.

A deep stillness reigned. Only from the tundra were there occasionally borne the sounds of passing reindeer herds. They moved swiftly, and the cries of the herds-men were drowned in the clicking of hooves. The herds passed westwards into the Ryokaliaout tundra, and a deep and solemn silence descended on the world once more.

The moon rose high. Its bright light made seal hunting and fox trapping possible, and the renewal of intercourse with the people of the neighbouring settlements. The yarangs of the Enmakai settlement loomed sombrely in the eerie moonlight. Outside the largest yarang, belonging to Alitet, on the edge of the settlement, stood a crowd of young hunters. Despite the terrific frost they were all bareheaded. Their hair, covered with hoarfrost, gleamed like silver. Their swarthy faces were nipped red. They had gathered to see Alitet off. His booming voice sounded from behind the polog:

"Tumatu-uge!"

"Vo-ooi!" responded Tumatuge and, despite his illness, he rushed forward with alacrity to answer the call.

If Alitet had commanded him to jump off the cliff Tumatuge would have complied without hesitation.

"Harness Charlie in front, and Kaper in the shaft!"

"E-heil" responded Tumatuge swiftly and made for the sledge lying on the trestles.

The young men ran up to assist him. It was a splendid sledge, made of Kolyma birchwood by the finest craftsmen. The sledge was painted a bright green. There was not a single nail or bolt in it. Everything was lashed together with good strong leather thongs. That is why it lay on trestles, beyond the reach of hungry dogs, who might chew the straps. Every thing in Alitet's household had its proper place. Alitet liked things shipshape.

The sledge stood ready at the entrance to the yarang. Tumatuge unwound a long walrus hide strap—the traces—furnished with loops at intervals of two arms' length. To these loops the dogs were hitched in pairs. Charlie ran towards the sledge, dragging Tumatuge after him. The huge grey dog, resembling a husky wolf, was eager to get into harness. Tumatuge gripped the dog by the breech band and it was all he could do to keep up with its headlong rush.

Charlie ran to the end of the stretched traces, came to a stop of his own accord and sat down on his haunches. His long red tongue lolled and his eyes blazed with excitement.

The other lads led up the rest of the team. The dogs, healthy and well-fed, were all eager to get into harness and take a run. Charlie lay down in the snow and, turning over on his back, began to roll himself about, kicking his legs in the air. All the other dogs simultaneously followed suit.

Tumatuge ran to the polog.

"Alitet!" he cried. "The dogs are tumbling in the snow. There will be a blizzard."

"Never mind," growled Alitet.

He leisurely finished off his last mug of tea. No sooner did he make his appearance than the dogs leapt to their feet, eager to be off. Charlie howled.

Alitet responded to the lads' greetings, carefully inspected the harness and, with a look of displeasure, adjusted the traces of three of the dogs.

"Belly band!" he shouted to his wife.

Narginaut ran into the yarang and brought out a small reindeer skin with strings at the ends.

"Charlie's fur is thin on the flanks, he may freeze them. I'll have to wrap him up on the way," said Alitet.

The dogs keenly watched his every movement.

Alitet turned the sledge over, runners up.

"They are rough. Need icing!"

Tumatuge's countenance fell and he felt a twinge of guilt. "How had he overlooked icing the runners?" He dashed precipitately into the yarang and instantly reappeared with a kettle of water. Hastily wetting a bit of bearskin he applied it to the runners. A thin coating of ice formed on the sledge runners.

Alitet examined it and said:

"Too thick. It will break off going over the bumps."

Tumatuge pulled out his knife and swiftly scraped off the ice crust clean to the wood.

Alitet took the piece of bearskin and ran the length of the overturned sledge, applying the skin to the runners as he did so.

"That's the way to do it!"

Tumatuge emptied the contents of the kettle into a bottle and gave it to Alitet.

Thrusting the bottle under his parka Alitet sat down on the sledge. The dogs quivered.

"Eheil!" cried Alitet, and the team wrenched the sledge and dashed off down the hillside.

The lads gazed with envy at the swiftly retreating dog-team of Alitet.

And there was something to look at! It was well worth the risk of a frostbitten ear.

Alitet bought his dogs from the Kolyma team drivers

and paid eight and more white fox skins for each. There was not a better dog-team on the whole coast. No one except Alitet could afford such dogs. He conducted trade with the nomads and every year he brought them walrus skins, leather thongs and footwear, of which the herdsmen needed a lot. He brought them merchandise from Mr. Thompson's trading post and carried out of the tundra every year large quantities of fox skins.

Whenever a hunter reared a good dog it was bound to find its way to Alitet. There was no way of avoiding yielding up a good dog to him—he would take it away in any case. Alitet was fond of husky dogs with a good stride. The dogs had to be of equal size, so that they could follow in each other's tracks. With dogs like these he could brave any blizzard.

The dogs, with uplifted muzzles, sniffed the scent of wild game, and raced on at a spanking rate. Alitet was in a good humour. He always felt in a festive mood when riding out to trade with Charlie.

CHAPTER SIX

Under the hillside, overlooking a steep cliff, stood the Loren settlement with its straggling yarangs. Some of the yarangs were big, dome-shaped canvas-covered dwellings, others were quite small with roofs made of walrus skins. On the edge of this straggling settlement stood cone-shaped yarangs patched up with sacks, old walrus skins and bits of sealskin. Here dwelt the hunters who never knew the faint languor and pleasant drowsiness that comes of having had enough to eat.

There was a scarcity of good pelts. After each walrus hunt the hunters gave up the pelts to the master, the man who owned the boat. Some of the skins together with the meat went for food. No clothes could keep a

man warm in winter unless he had walrus meat in his belly.

The cliff fell away to a low stretch of beach, covered with pebbles and snow. Here, close by the seashore, and standing apart from the yarangs, was a building of a rather unusual type in this part of the country. Its roof and walls were of corrugated iron sheeting. This iron house belonged to Charles Thompson.

Charlie, as Mr. Thompson bade the natives call him, had lived here for over twenty years without a break. An odd vagary of fate had cast his life on these remote and alien shores. When still a young man he had murdered his wife and fled his native Norway seeking refuge from justice in America. Roaming from country to country he had eventually made his way to Alaska. In America he had changed his name to Charles Thompson and adopted American citizenship.

In Alaska the gold rush had turned his head, as it had those of many others. But wherever he happened to be he was haunted by the constant fear of discovery. In America the extradition law was in effect for criminals.

A fugitive from the laws of the white man, Charles Thompson crossed the Bering Strait into the unfrequented latitudes of the Chukotsk Peninsula, which rumour credited with no less gold than there was in Alaska.

When Charles Thompson first set foot on Chukotsk shores his entire belongings consisted of a pickaxe and the few pocket instruments that comprised the usual equipment of gold prospectors. Charles Thompson knew only too well that gold would enable him to fight any laws.

But digging and panning out ore alone in the cold and deserted tundras was no light task. The life of the lone gold prospector was fraught with great risk. Tomorrow a devilish run of luck might make him a millionaire, or he might die of starvation like a solitary beast.

He had not been in Loren for long, however, when he made a very important discovery which radically changed the whole pattern of his future life. He saw gold pouring into the hands of smugglers in the form of expensive furs with practically no effort on their part. There was no doubt in his mind as to the lucrative prospects of this honourable pursuit.

The smugglers offered him to act as their agent. On the basis of a simple gentleman's agreement, without paying a single cent, he received from them a considerable cargo of goods. Mr. Thompson shortly married a Chukchi woman and settled down to the life of a trader at Loren.

The following summer the smuggler schooner failed to show up. Rumours said that she had struck a reef and gone down with the whole of the honourable crew with whom Mr. Thompson had made his verbal agreement.

After this bit of good luck Mr. Thompson became the possessor of a private account with a Washington banking-house. His first substantial deposit from the proceeds of his fur deals was to remain one of the most thrilling memories of his life.

Many years had since passed, and the pickaxe with which he had arrived on Chukotsk now lay on a shelf in his store as a talisman that had brought Mr. Thompson to this El Dorado.

Charles Thompson was by now a man of no little affluence. He no longer dealt with smugglers, but was connected, on his own showing, with "a real respectable firm."

Every summer a schooner came to him from America with a cargo of goods. The hunters worked day and night for several days in succession hauling the cargo ashore. The cases and bales lay for a long time on the shore unguarded, yet not a single brick of tea, not a single piece of sugar or plug of tobacco would ever be

missing. Here on these shores dwelt an amazingly honest people. Despite their dire poverty and great need the idea of stealing anything from Charlie never entered anyone's mind. And when the schooner left, the cargo was carried into the warehouse, not for the sake of getting it under lock and key, but merely to protect it from the rain, snow and winds.

Every summer the skipper handed Mr. Thompson a bank statement showing that some ten to fifteen thousand dollars had been paid into his account for the previous year's fur proceeds. In the long winter nights, while the blizzard howled outside, Mr. Thompson would study his bank accounts with immense satisfaction. Having gazed his fill he would lock the papers again in his strongbox. His account was big enough to provide him security for the rest of his life on the interest alone. Mr. Thompson was beginning to think of leaving this country, but the desire to scrape together another ten thousand or so dollars induced him to postpone his departure from year to year.

On second thoughts Mr. Thompson would say to himself: "But why should I quit this place? In this country I am a representative of civilization, I enjoy a special privilege as a sort of colonial governor. Go back to the States? Or to Norway? What for? To be lost amid the vast surge of none too happy people? No! I'll stay here another year."

Over a dozen dog sledges stood hitched around Mr. Thompson's iron house. The dogs lay sprawling in relaxed attitudes after the long trail. The hunters were gathered about their sledges exchanging the latest items of news. The centre of interest was a young man named Aye from Yanrakenot. In his sealskin bag lay the pelt of a rare animal—a silver fox. Aye was cheerful and this made men wonder, for everyone knew that the trapping of such game was an omen of ill luck to the hunter.

But Aye was apparently too young to understand that, they thought.

But Aye knew all the omens. He deliberately made no mention of the fact that he had another silver fox in his bag, and the catching of two silver foxes at the same time was, on the contrary, a sign of good luck. And so Aye did not look grieved.

Besides, it was sometimes advisable, when transacting barter business, to act the simpleton, inexperienced in the world and its ways. It would be amusing to see how men pitied you.

The hunters looked forward that day to good trading. Aye was to start it. Charlie would be so delighted by the sight of the rare animal that his red nose would start twitching.

A tall dark-eyed lad with an incipient moustache, Aye wore an air of importance beyond his years. It was not everyone who could bring Charlie Red Nose a silver fox. When Charlie invited the hunters to tea in the little hallway of his iron house before opening business Aye took the most prominent seat.

The hospitable, hearty American never stinted anyone a cup of strong tea with a soda cracker. He even treated the hunters who came down to the trading post out of sheer curiosity to watch other men trading. He had a good eye for business, had Mr. Thompson. And hunters and trappers would often come down from hundreds of miles away to take a cup of tea in his iron house and examine his wares.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mr. Thompson's store was a primitive affair in the matter of fixtures. The walls were of corrugated iron and the shelves were made of rough bulkhead boards. Similar boards resting on two big barrels served as a counter.

Mr. Thompson did not believe in squandering dollars. Sooner or later he would have to leave all this behind.

The shelves were loaded with tobacco, bunting, beads, cartridges, hair combs, thimbles and needles. On the wall hung three sample Winchesters of different calibres—25 by 20, 30 by 30 and 44. These were the only type and calibres of rifle in use among the local hunters.

Mr. Thompson himself sat behind the counter. He was a burly man of about fifty-five with a square jaw and sagging jowls and pouches under his eyes. His pale, clean-shaven face was set off by a big blotchy red nose. Mr. Thompson had the appearance of a good-natured, even-tempered man. There was an air of dignified composure about his substantial figure. His bulkiness was enhanced by a pair of fur trousers and an unbuttoned fur windbreaker, beneath which he wore a heavy woolen shirt of a checked pattern.

Mr. Thompson amiably surveyed the crowd of hunters who thronged around the counter and said:

“So here we are. This is going to be a big day!”

The hunters pushed Aye to the fore. Mr. Thompson's frame of mind was a matter of great concern to them. How would Charlie Red Nose conduct business today? Would he be generous with his wares or not? You could never tell with him.

Aye with an air of unflurried gravity laid out his silver fox.

Mr. Thompson, as was to be expected, got up swiftly and fairly pounced upon it. A pleased smile passed over the faces of the hunters.

Mr. Thompson closely examined the pelt through his horn-rimmed glasses. He stretched the skin to its full length and blew on it. A soft silvery ripple ran up the pelt from tail to ears. There was a look of unconcealed admiration on his face as he puffed loudly on

the silky fur. His eyes actually gleamed. The fox was undoubtedly a first-rate specimen.

The hunters watched with bated breath. They knew what they were about when they had let Aye go first. Aye, feeling himself a great trapper, looked on importantly and with an air of utter unconcern. O, this was a great day for Aye too! It was the first time in his life that he had trapped such a fox.

The hunters were all agog with curiosity. Many of them had never trapped such an animal. The silver fox had become a matter of pride for them all.

What would Charlie Red Nose give for it?

Mr. Thompson threw the pelt onto a pile of skins with studied indifference.

"It is a good fox," he said, and with slow deliberation began laying out on the counter an enamelled tea kettle, a knife for dressing skins, a dozen plugs of tobacco, five bricks of tea and four yards of bunting.

The hunters jostled one another round the counter to obtain a better view of these riches. Aye alone maintained an air of indifference.

Charlie thought wonderingly: "He's not satisfied! What the dickens does that savage need?" and got out in addition some beads, a file, needles, thimbles and a comb.

"Ten articles for one animal, and half of them iron!" he exclaimed, amazed at his own generosity.

"Ai, what a lot!" clamoured the hunters on all sides. "Ai, what a lot!"

The animal was a splendid specimen, it is true, but no one expected Charlie to offer such an abundance in exchange. They knew perfectly well that when Charlie was in a bad mood he was liable to forget what a hunter most needed. At such times the hunters would resort to cunning and steal a march on Charlie by concealing from him the fact that they had more pelts in their bags.

They would carry them back for a hundred miles or more, figuring to come down with them another time.

Mr. Thompson was acquainted with all these artifices and did not let them bother him. What difference did it make whether he cleared up all the furs now or a little later? What did matter was that the furs should be available for the arrival of the schooner.

Today the hunters had decided to trade all they had, for Charlie was in a good humour. They crowded around the counter, each awaiting his turn.

Aye stood silently before his ten articles, and instead of putting them away into his bag, he stood leisurely filling his pipe with a mixture of tobacco and wood chaff. Then, lighting up, he raised his head and said:

"Charlie, I do not need the things you have put out here."

The hunters were thunderstruck.

"What? You do not want these—this here real American tobacco instead of that rubbish you are smoking?"

"I want a rifle."

"The hell you do! You haven't got enough pelts for a rifle. You'll have to throw in at least one white fox if you want a rifle." Mr. Thompson was indignant.

"I will bring you a white fox another time."

"Nothing doing! I have only a few Winchesters left, and they are sold to Alitet. He's taking them into the hills for the nomad reindeer men."

"That's a pity," said Aye calmly. "Give me back the fox."

This unexpected demand left Mr. Thompson speechless. At length he removed his fur cap, revealing bald patches amid reddish hair, wiped them with a red handkerchief, took off his glasses and wiped them too, then said in a lower tone:

"Have you ever seen such a hunter? Where has he learned to trade like this? Has anybody been teaching you to trade like this?"

"Yes."

"Who?" Mr. Thompson snapped.

Aye was silent. He stood shuffling his feet uneasily.

"Well, why don't you speak?"

"Charlie," Aye began. "You know our old man Kamenvat. He has a daughter named Tygrena. She has been plighted to me. That is why I always consult this old man. It was he who told me of the place where the silver foxes could be found. I went there and for six days I kept watch over my trap. For six days I lived in the snow. And while I was away a Russian man spent the night in our settlement. His name was Partisan."

Mr. Thompson looked up sharply. He had read about the Russian revolution in the newspapers and had heard that there had been frequent changes of whiteguard rulers on Kamchatka—with Kolchak in power one day and Kappel the next—and that Soviet partisans were operating in the mountains of Kamchatka. The fact that a partisan had turned up on the Chukotsk coast came as a shock to him.

"This Partisan (Aye supposed this to be the Russian's name) sat up all night talking to our old man. Tygrena listened too. She told me that the Russian had spoken about a new law of life, a new law of trade. So she said. And when I sat on the sledge, before setting out to come down here, she ran up to me and said: 'Aye, try to trade with Charlie the way Partisan said! Choose yourself what you want to barter your fox skin for. Ask for a rifle.' That is how it was, Charlie...."

"Ha! ha! ha! Since when have women begun to teach men how to trade? Shame! Just look at this hunter!"

"Tygrena is a good hunter herself. She knows how

to handle a rifle as well as a man and is an excellent shot," answered Aye proudly.

"Very well," muttered Mr. Thompson with a sneer. "Take your fox. I can see it rotting in your yarang and you getting nothing for it."

And as Charlie Red Nose bent down to get the fox, Aye, too, said with a little smile:

"It will not rot. I shall take it to Pete."

"To Pete Brukhanov?"

Mr. Thompson, still holding the pelt in his hand, said angrily:

"The man is mad, he has lost his senses entirely! Why, you head of a seal, do you not know that Mr. Pete lives five hundred miles from here?"

"That doesn't matter. I don't mind if it does take me twenty days."

"All right, I will give you the rifle, just out of pity for your poor dogs."

And Mr. Thompson took a new Winchester, calibre 25 by 20, off the wall and handed it to Aye.

"It is not a strong rifle," said Aye irresolutely. "It cannot kill anything bigger than a seal. You know yourself, Charlie, what rifles are used for walruses. I want a 30 by 30 rifle."

"A real hunter should not be such a cadger as you are!" growled Mr. Thompson, but fearing lest the lad really take his fox to the Russian merchant, he gave him the rifle he asked for.

The gratified hunter placed the rifle next to his bag and pulled out a second silver fox even more splendid than the first.

"Kakomei!"* the hunters cried in astonishment.

One lad, his eyes round with amazement, ejaculated:

"It is fit to make one burst with surprise!"

* An interjection expressing amazement.—*Trans.*

"Okay! I see you have turned out to be quite a fine hunter. I suppose you must be on friendly terms with the spirits if they allow you to trap such fine animals?"

"Yes, that is so. I always try to please the spirits," replied Aye.

Mr. Thompson examined the fox skin, and for the first time in twenty years, asked:

"What do you want for this one?"

The hunters gasped. They could scarcely believe their ears. Charlie Red Nose had asked Aye what he wanted! That might be very good or it might be very bad. It was difficult for them to say.

"There are two of us without rifles," said Aye. "We never had good rifles. Give me another one. Give me a rifle for Tygrena."

"You goddam son of a bitch! You are crazy! Why, the first rifle isn't fully paid for, and you are asking for another one! Do you want to incur the wrath of the spirits?"

The hunters scowled at Aye. He seemed to be setting himself out deliberately to spoiling Charlie's temper, and they had not yet begun business with him.

Just then a boy came running in, shouting: "Alitet! Alitet!"

The door was flung open and Alitet strode into the store, dressed in a smart new parka made of marbled young reindeer skins.

"Hullo, Alitet!" cried Mr. Thompson, overjoyed at seeing him.

The hunters quickly cleared a way for Alitet who strode past them towards the counter and held his hand out to Mr. Thompson. Catching sight of Aye he asked mockingly:

"What are you doing here? Come to see how hunters conduct trade?"

"Oh, no, he is a great hunter himself!" said Charlie. "Look at this silver fox I have bought from him. But that is not all. Here is another one."

Alitet's eyes glittered with envy.

"How is it no men knew of your having trapped these foxes?" he asked suspiciously.

"Now they all know," retorted Aye with dignity. "You, too, may look at them."

"Where did you trap them?"

"In the tundra."

"The tundra is as vast as the sea."

Aye said nothing. He remembered what Vaamcho had told him of how Alitet had poured kerosene over his bait, and he was loath to engage with Alitet in hunting talk.

"You are silent? Maybe you caught them in another man's trap?" said Alitet sarcastically.

Aye flushed. The insult was unendurable. What would men think? Aye was sorely tempted there and then to make public what he knew of Alitet's machinations, but Vaamcho had asked him not to breathe a word about it. Controlling himself with an effort Aye said:

"These foxes, Alitet, I caught next to the Three Hills. You know the place, Vaamcho set his bait there too. But I poured Tang lamp fat on my bait. True, the white fox runs away from the evil smell, but the silver fox seems to like the smell. I was not aware of it."

Aye eyed him with a twinkle of malice and paused for him to reply. But Alitet turned swiftly to Thompson and muttered:

"Wasting time on foolish talk is like eating snow—you will not quench your thirst. I would like some tea, Charlie, after my journey."

"Okay!" shouted Mr. Thompson. "We'll shut up shop for a while. I don't mind having a bite myself."

Mr. Thompson cast a last avid glance at the fox skin and threw it onto a pile of furs.

"The trading can wait. Now, all clear the place. You will get your goods later on," he said to Aye.

"Maybe you will take the fox later on as well?" said Aye, getting on the high ropes.

"Goddam!" Mr. Thompson flared up. "Truly, this young man's head differs little from that of the seal! He is afraid that he will not get paid for his fox. Charlie has never yet owed a man anything. On the contrary, nearly every one of you is in debt to me."

"True, true, Charlie!" cried the hunters in chorus. "We are all in debt to you."

The hunters did not understand the meaning of "goddam," but they all knew that it was a bad omen in the forthcoming deals.

Charlie bent down, picked up the fox skin and threw it in Aye's face. No one was sorry for Aye. Everyone felt that he deserved it.

"Take it back, take it back! Aye can wait!" cried one of the hunters.

It was a flustered Aye who clutched the fox skin in one hand and wiped his perspiring brow in silence with the other hand. He felt ashamed that his conduct had aroused the displeasure of his fellow tribesmen.

Alitet snatched the pelt out of his hand and threw it behind the counter.

"Merkichkin!" he rapped out a Chukchi oath.

"All right," said Aye, yielding. "Let it remain with you."

"Just as you like," said Mr. Thompson, mollified. "Charlie knows how you live. I have always tried to make things easier for you."

The store rapidly emptied out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Alitet returned home with his sledge laden high with various goods. He was highly pleased with his bargain and promised Charlie to collect a large quantity of furs from the nomad reindeer people. They lived far away in the hills and never came down to the coast. But before setting out on the long trek to the hills Alitet decided to bring home a second wife. The girl he wanted to take was betrothed to Aye from childhood. Alitet knew that. But the sharpened feeling of hostility towards Aye following the incident in Charlie's store had strengthened his resolve to take the girl from him.

He set out for Yanrakenot the following day. In his sledge lay the pelt of a young reindeer, the Chukchi marriage token. Old Kamenvat, of course, would not refuse to accept this offering and would gladly give Tygrena away to Alitet. If not, Alitet would take her by force.

The weather was calm and fine, with the moon shining brightly. Alitet rode fast. About midway the dog-team swept out onto the Irgonei plateau. Alitet brought the team to a halt and scanned the ice fields out at sea. Beyond them lay the black strip of the open sea with the sky hanging darkly above it.

On the other side, the mountains towered beneath a bright starry sky. Now and again a shooting star dropped earthwards. Alitet dug the gee pole deeper into the snow and brought out his pipe and tobacco. He sat back in the sledge smoking, then after a while he slowly got up and stepped over to the lead dog.

Charlie wagged his tail and reared on his hind legs, begging for his master's caress. When Alitet came up closer Charlie leapt forward and placed his powerful forepaws on his master's chest, licking his face and nuzzling his head amid the warm folds of his fur gar-

ment. Alitet took the dog's muzzle in his hands and rubbed noses with him, saying:

"Run faster, Charlie! Tygrena is waiting for us in Yanrakenot. The strongest and most beautiful of all girls, the daughter of Kamenvat, the old beggar Kamenvat. When Tygrena comes to my yarang I shall order her to feed you with the choicest morsels of walrus meat."

He patted Charlie's head and stepped over to another dog.

"And you, Wolf Spine, what are you drawing in your foot for? Hurt your paw? Let me see it!"

The husky black dog with bright, expressive eyes rolled over onto its side and held its paw out. The heel was bleeding.

Alitet tied a little fur stocking on the injured foot and went over to Kaper.

The huge old hound sat at the end of the traces next to the sledge. It evinced no great joy at the approach of its master, but wagged its tail with a gleam of cunning in its eye. Alitet had no love for this dog and had long been wanting to get rid of it. Kaper was a hindrance to the team, he did not run well in the traces. That day, too, he had tried Alitet's temper more than once. The hour would have to be taught a lesson.

Alitet suddenly kicked the dog full in the face. The hound sprang to its feet, its tail between its legs, gazing askance at its master. Alitet took hold of its muzzle. Kaper darted back, but was unable to wrench itself free from the man's grip.

"Scared, are you? Soon old Kamenvat will be your master. With that old man, my father-in-law, you may laze about all your life."

Alitet gripped the dog's muzzle with one hand and stroked it with the other. The dog quivered under the unaccustomed caress. Alitet reached out for the gee pole. Kaper leapt aside but the harness held him fast. Alitet

swung the pole. The dog cowered at his feet, whining and covering up its eyes. Alitet struck a swinging blow at its head. In a fit of fury he rained blows on its sides and back. Kaper lay huddled up in the snow, yelping and whimpering.

Suddenly the dog paired with Kaper snarled and sunk its fangs into Alitet's leg, tearing out a piece of the trousers. Alitet sprang back, snatched up his Winchester and shot the dog point-blank.

There was a glimmer of light in the sky. Sandy River* traced a glowing path across the heavens.

"I am a man of the Sun God. All the people of the coast know me. The Chauchu know me. I am a great friend of Charlie, the Merican."

Thus Alitet communed aloud with himself as he gazed at the glowing heavens.

The dogs pricked up their ears at the sound of his voice, and, taking it for a signal to start, they sprang forward, only to be checked by the gee pole which held the sledge fast. The dogs looked back. Alitet drove the pole deeper into the snow and went on with his musings:

"I daresay the people who dwell in the heavens, the people of the Upper World, know me too. Look how brightly the Hare Heap** shines. And over there is Dug-in Stake.*** And those stars, sliding down the mountains.... There is Limpid Ribs.**** And the Giants who make the wind—where are they?"

Long luminous shafts were flung across the sky as far as the North Star like walrus thongs stretched from yarang to yarang. These shafts now extended to Limpid Ribs, now scattered in all directions like a startled herd

* The Milky Way.—*Trans.*

** Cassiopeia.—*Trans.*

*** The North Star.—*Trans.*

**** Venus.—*Trans.*

of reindeer. The sky became alive in a riot of colours such as are not met with on earth. Flaming streaks of flickering light spread swiftly across the whole heavens, their shimmering bands crisscrossing from end to end of the firmament. Amid these dazzling streamers of the Aurora Borealis the moon hung pale and envious like an old wife.

Alitet, thrilled and startled, peered up into the sky and thought: "The people of the Upper World are celebrating a great feast. They have lighted many campfires."

But the heavenly fires soon burnt themselves out. They died away in fitful spurts, and once more the moon reigned supreme in a halo of brilliant stars.

Alitet filled his pipe, struck a thick American match against the sledge and lit up.

Further on the trail ran over the icebound sea. Everything around was utterly still. Shooting stars dropped from the heavens. To Alitet it seemed as though the dwellers of the Upper World were throwing disused old burners out of their yarangs.

The team sped over the fantastic chaos of pack ice like some frightened bird, now sweeping up the side of one icy obstacle, now plunging down onto another. Alitet jumped off the sledge and ran alongside, steering its course and helping it over the ice. The sledge would lift its nose, hang suspended, as it were, in mid-air for a brief moment, then swoop down with a crash as it hit the ice. It creaked under the strain but did not break. Alitet's sledge was strongly lashed with sturdy thongs. There was not another sledge like it on the coast, and none of Alitet's tribesmen could ride the way he did.

The ice packs had come to an end, and the team swept into the Yanrakenot settlement with a loud barking. They were greeted by an answering howl from the dogs of the settlement. The sledge drew up outside old Kamenvat's yarang.

Half-dressed people thrust bared heads out of their yarangs to take a look at the newcomer. Soon Alitet's sledge was surrounded by a crowd of hastily-dressed people. Aye, too, was in the crowd. He was seized with a painful foreboding. On Alitet's sledge lay the reindeer marriage pelt. "Why has Alitet stopped at Kamenvat's yarang? Does he not know that Tygrena is my plighted wife? All the people on the coast know it."

Aye's heart sank and he walked back in silence to his yarang.

Like a bird in the tundra that flits from hummock to hummock, so did the news fly from yarang to yarang.

CHAPTER NINE

Tygrena, tired after the day's hunting, lay stretched on a couch of reindeer skins, fast asleep. Her long black braids tossed on the white pelts looked even blacker by contrast. She smiled in her sleep.

At her side, gazing down at her young face, squatted her old mother. She was loath to wake her. Tygrena opened her eyes and seeing her mother, laughed a soft, almost noiseless laugh, displaying her even white teeth. Her black eyes glowed.

"I had a dream, mother," said Tygrena. "A good dream. I dreamt that Aye and I were living in a yarang of our own. There were a lot of children in the polog, a whole crowd of them. Aye said to me: 'Tygrena, we must enlarge our yarang, we must go to the hills and get skins from the reindeer men.'"

Tygrena sat up and burst into a merry peal of laughter. She broke off at the sound of voices outside.

"What is the noise outside our yarang?"

"Tygrena, Alitet has stopped at our yarang. People say the marriage reindeer skin lies on his sledge. This is a great joy for us."

Tygrena was dumbfounded.

"But what about Aye?" she said. "He is my betrothed from childhood. The day is drawing near when we shall live together. Or have the people on the coast forgotten this? Have they forgotten our law? Why has Alitet, that old man, brought his deerskin here? He is crafty and greedy! He is a treacherous man! Aye wanted to buy me a rifle for the second silver fox, but Alitet told Charlie Red Nose not to give it to him. I do not want to live in his vile dwelling. Let Aye take that deerskin and throw it into the sea with a weight to it!" Tygrena spoke hotly.

"My daughter, my ears are not accustomed to such speeches. They will bring misfortune upon us," remonstrated the mother with a deep sigh.

Tygrena got up in silence and went over to a corner of the tent. She stood with her back to her mother, lost in thought. Her lithe strong body, hardened by hunting, seemed to be all sinews and muscle.

Kamenvat, her father, had grown old and she had been obliged to go out hunting with the men. But she had come to love the arduous work of men. After a successful hunt she would come home happy and radiant and her merry laughter could be heard ringing throughout the settlement. She was looking forward eagerly to the time when she and Aye would start their own and still happier life together. Now a cold sense of bewilderment and disaster weighted her down. A haze suffused itself over her eyes. Tygrena did not hear what her mother was saying.

"Tygrena, do you hear? We must make tea," her mother repeated. "Take that big kettle there."

Tygrena started, went over to the burner and began stirring the flame in silence. She threw pained glances at her mother who was spreading the best deerskins for the guest's couch.

Outside Kamenvat pottered about attending to Alitet's

dogs. Now and then he threw an anxious glance towards Aye's yarang. Kamenvat loved Aye as a son, and he knew that Aye's heart must now be beating like that of a reindeer brought to bay by a wolf. But what was one to do? How could one refuse Alitet? Alitet was a rich man, the son of Korauge the great shaman. You could not refuse him!

The old man fumbled with the axe in an effort to chop up the frozen walrus meat. Alitet stood by impressively, leaning against the yarang, waiting to see his dogs fed. One could not entrust such an important matter as the feeding of his dogs to an old man who had never had a good team of his own.

Aye stood outside his yarang, kicking at the hard snow to conceal his agitation. He felt sorry for the old man. Aye always helped him and Tygrena to chop the meat which was frozen as hard as a stone.

"I shall not go and help him now," thought Aye. "Alitet will carry off Tygrena all the same.... Perhaps I should help him, though. How difficult it is for him."

On the spur of the moment he ran over to Kamenvat, and with a silent gesture asked for the axe.

Kamenvat straightened his back and his gaze dropped in confusion before that of Aye. The axe fell out of his hand. Aye picked it up and began to chop the meat.

Kamenvat looked sadly at Aye, then pointing towards his yarang he muttered:

"I will go inside...."

Aye quickly chopped up the meat and laid the pieces into a bowl. Alitet said to him:

"That one over there is Charlie. See that he gets a piece with fat on it. Give him two pieces."

Aye picked up the bowl. The dogs sprang to their feet, huddled together with uplifted muzzles and gleaming eyes.

"Charlie!" cried Alitet.

Aye threw a piece of meat which Charlie snapped up in mid-air.

"Utilhen!" cried Alitet, calling another dog.

Utilhen's portion, however, was intercepted by Kaper. Alitet seized the dog by the throat, tore the meat out of its jaws and threw it to Utilhen.

Thus, calling his dogs one by one, Alitet fed them with discrimination, throwing mocking glances in the meantime at Aye.

In the uneventful lives of the coast dwellers every scrap of news was cherished in the memory and everyone knew where a person had died, where a child had been born and who was to marry whom. Alitet knew, too, that Aye was to marry Tygrena. On the day of her birth, amid a winter blizzard, when the newborn infant had been rubbed with snow, the whole settlement knew that Tygrena was designated to be Aye's wife. They grew up together, played together and later went hunting together. They grew fond of each other and looked forward eagerly to the day when they would become man and wife.

Alitet knew that too.

"But when the fox finds a piece of meat in the tundra, does not the wolf take it away from him? In fact, he has no need to take it—the fox will run away himself as soon as the wolf approaches," thought Alitet as he stood watching Aye.

He took the marriage deerskin and went into the yarang. At the entrance to the polog he halted and coughed to make known his presence.

"You have come, Alitet?" sounded the aged voice of Kamenvat.

"Yes, it is I," answered Alitet and proffered the skin of the young deer.

The old man accepted the gift.

Alitet, bending down, swiftly entered the polog. His complacent, grinning face was flushed. Tygrena stood with her back to him braiding her hair. It was light in the polog. Kamenvat sat on a pile of skins with Alitet's marriage offering in his hands.

"A fine pelt," he said with a pathetic smile and handed it to his wife.

The old woman carefully folded the pelt and hung it up in a conspicuous place. Tygrena's fate was sealed.

The daughter placed a little table on short legs in the middle of the polog in utter silence, then, with her face sullenly averted from Alitet, began to pour out the tea.

"Tygrena, why do I see no joy in your face?" her mother asked. "See what an honoured guest has entered our dwelling."

Tygrena did not raise her eyes. One might think that she had not heard her mother's question. For the first time in her life she did not answer her parent.

Alitet looked at Tygrena and said:

"That is nothing. Happiness is a snowflake. A wind blows and it rises. One must wait for a fair wind."

Alitet stripped to the waist and moved up to the table. He drank tea and spoke about the big walrus hunt of the previous summer and about the heavenly fires that had lighted his way down. And all the time he never once addressed himself to Tygrena.

When Alitet went out to look at his dogs, Kamenvat crawled out of the polog after him.

"My daughter!" said the old woman. "Now you will be a real woman. Your children will not go hungry. Alitet always has plenty of meat. But woe to you if you have no children. Then you will not become a real woman."

Early the next morning Alitet left for the Enmakai settlement with his young wife Tygrena, leaving Kamenvat three dogs.

CHAPTER TEN

A great change had come over Tygrena. She had become gloomy and silent, like a caged fox. She who had been so gay and talkative at home in Yanrakenot was now mute in the yarang of Alitet.

She took up a sealskin, cut out a sole and began listlessly turning up the edges. Presently the work dropped out of her hands.

Tygrena had sewn torbazes since childhood. But at home she had taken a lively interest in her work and had made pretty embroidered designs on the tops with coloured nap. During the long winters she would not manage to make more than a few pairs—for her father, her betrothed and herself. What pleasure each pair of torbazes had afforded! Tygrena's skill was the talk of all the yarangs.

Here in Alitet's home she had to make simple fur shoes for the herdsmen. She had already sewn twenty pairs and there was no end to it. The work heavily taxed her strength.

Alitet was for ever driving her, and as soon as a load of torbazes was ready he would take them along with other goods into the interior of the tundra to the reindeer men.

Narginaut emerged from her polog and sat down beside Tygrena. She began speaking to her in a gentle, motherly voice:

"You are still working, my child. Alitet is so greedy that even if you made two pairs a day he would not be satisfied. The tundra is vast. The people there are many."

"Narginaut, why must he take upon himself to provide the nomad people with boots?" asked Tygrena.

"They have no sealskins there, and the herdsmen run about all the time—they need a lot of boots."

"We also sewed boots for the nomads, but they were our kinsmen. Has Alitet so many kinsmen?"

"No, he barter the torbazes for the pelts of the white

fox. All the women of our settlement sew boots for him and still it is not enough for him."

Tygrena, laying aside her sewing, sat listening to the gentle voice of Narginaut. This elderly woman, whom she had at first thought so forbidding, spoke so kindly.

"Did you sew much yourself, Narginaut? I see that your hands are scratched."

"No. In the beginning we lived as all other folks live. I had three children. And I was very happy. Then I lost everything. Alitet fell a prey to a strong malady. Korauge said that the eldest boy was to carry away the disease. Alitet strangled the boy and got well. The girl died the same way. And now I live without a heart. I have no heart, Tygrena." She added in a whisper: "It must have torn loose."

The two women sat on in a long silence.

"And when Alitet made friends with the Merican," went on Narginaut, "he got spoilt entirely. He lost his peace of mind. He rarely stays at home. Always on the move, forever getting himself new dogs, riding about now on one dog-team, now on another. He took more worries upon himself than a person needs in life. And wives, too, he needs not at a'l for the sake of bearing him children."

The poor woman's words filled Tygrena with dismay.

"Narginaut," she said sadly, "I was plighted from birth to Aye. I am sorry for him. I did not want to come here. Do not be angry with me."

"I know. I feel better with you in the home. You shall be my sister. You will make life easier for me."

She paused, took the sewing out of Tygrena's hands and said:

"Go for a walk, Tygrena. I shall do your sewing for you. Even old Korauge sometimes crawls out of the yarang. Go to Vamcho. It is jolly there for young people. But try not to let Korauge see you. He does not like Vaamcho."

"I want to go hunting, Narginaut! I want the ice fields, the open spaces! It is the life I love and am accustomed to."

"I shall tell Alitet when he comes home. He will be glad. He has long stopped going out hunting himself, and he demands ever more and more skins. Now Tumatuge is fixing up a third polog. Alitet has decided to bring home a third wife," said Narginaut, and seeing Tygre-na's look of astonishment, she added: "Never mind, Tygre-na, it will be all the easier for us. You see how much work Alitet has devised."

Outside the wind howled. Alitet was in no hurry to get home. He rode about on his numerous errands and often spent the night with his nevtooms—his friends by wife. It was a custom along the coast for the hunters to arrange between themselves a temporary exchange of wives. Not infrequently one came across Chukchi families the head of which would say: "This is my son, and that is the son of my marriage friend." Such a bond between two families obliged them to render mutual assistance to each other. In the event of the death of a man his family was taken care of by his marriage friend. The male participants in this system of interchangeable marriage were called nevtooms.

But no one took advantage of this ancient custom so much as Alitet. He had such "friends" in practically every settlement.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Life in the Enmakai settlement ran its usual course. As soon as the blizzard died down the hunters went out to the icebound sea. With their hunting guns in sealskin sheaths slung over their shoulders they went out among the ice fields, seeking the open lanes of water formed

amid the wastes of ice through the action of the winds and sea currents.

Before setting out the old men of the settlement would forecast the size and location of these channels by their reflection in the sky. The large patches which resembled great lakes with icebound shores were ill-suited for hunting purposes, since the seal was hard to get at when it had been killed.

Clad in long overalls of a protective colouring the hunters would squat behind the shoulder of a large ice pack, smoking their pipes and keeping a sharp lookout for the seal. The latter rarely showed itself. But when it did, thrusting a bewhiskered head for an instant out of the water, there immediately followed the sharp report of a Winchester. The seal, with a flash of flippers would vanish for a minute beneath the water, then slowly float to the surface, staining the water red with its blood.

In this pursuit Tygrena was fully a match for any of the men of the Enmakai settlement. Seal hunting amid the ice fields she regarded as a welcome diversion after the dreariness of life in Alitet's yarang.

For three days in succession the hunters returned home without their quarry. On the fourth day a strong offshore wind sprang up. To tarry on the ice fields became dangerous. The hunters hastily quitted. All the men returned home, Tygrena amongst them, with the exception of Vaamcho. His absence caused anxiety.

"A very crafty spirit has appeared on the coast. He demands a big sacrifice," pronounced Korauge.

Tygrena thought.

"Alitet has gone to the tundra to visit Echavto, the rich reindeer herder. He will come back, that is certain. But Vaamcho.... He went far out into the ice fields on four dogs to find good hunting grounds. I wish it was Vaamcho who had gone to the tundra and Alitet was seeking good hunting grounds!"

She felt upon herself the keen searching gaze of the shaman. Tygrena wondered how the old man had guessed her wicked thoughts. A sudden feeling of terror gripped her. She got up and went outside.

She could not get Vaamcho out of her thoughts. One was always sorry for a good man. She drew mental pictures of him sitting somewhere amid the ice, seeking refuge from the gale.

"Where shall I go?" Tygrena asked herself.

The wind blew in violent gusts and the yarangs were almost hidden in the blinding blizzard. From the sea came the noise of moving pack ice.

"I shall go to Vaal," decided Tygrena at length.

Eight hunters sat in Vaal's yarang, forming a circle round the old man. An oppressive silence reigned. No one noticed that the burner was smoking. It was clear to everybody that Vaamcho had been carried out to sea on an ice floe. Tygrena stirred the moss in the burner with a little stick. She was afraid to enquire about Vaamcho and squatted down in silence.

Vaal sat with his head bowed. He did not even smoke. Big tears rolled down his furrowed face. Staring at his tear-moistened hand he said in a whisper:

"Never have I seen these . . . tears. I have become old. I cannot keep them back."

"Where is Vaamcho's other set of clothes?" asked Tygrena in a low voice.

"Out there . . . in the passage," answered the old man.

The hunters brought in Vaamcho's spare clothes and began making a dummy out of it. They hastily stuffed rags and various household oddments into the parka, the trousers and boots. Soon Vaamcho's clothes took on the form of a human body. All that remained of the old man's meagre household were two small skins. The rest had gone into the dummy.

"Perhaps you have not stuffed it well enough?" said the old man. "Take these too. I shall not need them, I shall not sleep."

The dummy was carefully carried out into the little passage.

CHAPTER TWELVE

As she was approaching her yarang on her way home Tygrena heard the loud throbbing of the drum.

She halted, but the wind nearly knocked her off her feet. She darted into the passageway and stood listening with thudding pulses to the shaman's howls and the throbbing of his drum.

The creepy sounds seemed to fill the whole yarang, darting like live things from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling. Tygrena pictured the never-smiling face of Korauge.

Something brushed against her feet in the darkness. She trembled in sheer terror. She wanted to rush into the polog, but fear rooted her to the spot. Her feet were leaden. Suddenly Tygrena heard a familiar little whine, and relief swept over her in a swift wave when she realized that it was the old dog that had come to lie down at her feet. She squatted down and pressed the dog's warm muzzle to her breast, stroking it gently.

From inside the yarang came the shaman's wild chant:

*"Cease, O wind!
Alitet has been gone many days.
Spirits, make the weather fine!
Take Vaamcho as a sacrifice...."*

Tygrena, listening with bated breath to the shaman's words, pressed the dog closer and whispered to it:

"It is good for you that you are a dog! It is better to be a dog. I do not want to go inside and meet the old man's eyes again. I wish I could sleep with you out here in the dark, not to see anyone."

The drum continued to throb.

Again the witch doctor's chant reached her from the inner apartment. The words rushed out of his throat in gasping croaks:

"His yarang is the source of misfortune . . . Ilineut froze to death. Vaamcho . . . the spirit . . ."

The noise of the drum drowned the words.

Presently silence fell in the yarang, broken only by the hoarse gasps of the old shaman. He had worked himself up into a frenzy and gasped like a harpooned walrus.

Tygrena's limbs grew numb and chilled from crouching. She got up cautiously and crept into the polog. She snuffed out the burners and hastily began undressing when she suddenly heard Korauge's hoarse voice :

"Even the beasts do not leave their lairs in such weather. Is it right for you to stray when your husband is absent?"

Tygrena said, without mentioning Vaamcho's name:

"Korauge, a man has been carried out to sea on the ice. The settlement is sunk in grief . . . A dummy has been prepared, for everyone is anxious to know whether the man is alive. Hark, do you hear the wind?"

"I hear everything, I know everything. Seek not grief there. Anything may happen, Alitet . . ." The shaman left the sentence unfinished for fear of putting the evil spirits onto his son's trail.

"Who knows, Korauge, what the evil spirits are up to? Were you not about to say that Alitet may have lost his way or fallen over a precipice?"

"Hold your tongue, woman, and go to sleep!" hissed Korauge. "Your tongue is truly a woman's, it waggles without sense."

Tygrena fervently wished that Alitet would fall off a cliff. After all, accidents like that did happen, and to good men too.

It was an anxious night. The wind swept seawards past the yarangs with unabated fury. The hunters had gathered again in old Vaal's yarang. The tent shook under the fierce impacts of the blizzard. The wind, penetrating through the openings of the passage cover, caused the dummy to stir. Two hunters stood watch over it in constant vigil, and from time to time they cried out to the old man: "It is moving!"

Vaal sat in the polog, and every time these words reached him, a happy smile lit up his careworn grief-stricken face.

It was clear to people that if the dummy moved, that meant that Vaamcho was still alive.

At midday the hunters came running in again with news that the sky was clearing, and they began to cheer up the old man:

"The wind should veer round soon and drive him back to shore."

"The sky is clearing, Vaal. The wind looks like dropping. That is very good for him...."

"We must ask Korauge to make a reverse wind for him."

Not one of the hunters mentioned Vaamcho by name. That had to be kept secret from the evil spirits.

The old man listened attentively to the hunters, gazing at them with sad and thoughtful eyes.

"Make me a pipe. My soul craves for a smoke," he said in a bleak voice.

Tygrena came into the yarang.

"Vaal, the sky is becoming fine. The blizzard will

cease and he will come home, I know it . . . he is an agile jumper”

Tygrena sat down by the burner and began refilling it with b'ubber which she had brought with her.

“It was Narginaut who told me to take some fat. She is an understanding woman.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On the eve, when Vaamcho, together with the other hunters, had returned empty-handed from the hunting grounds, old Vaal had said:

“The seals are far away now. Out by the distant patches of open sea.”

Vaamcho had sat in silence, apparently unmoved. His father was a great hunter and knew what he was talking about. But who would venture so far from the shore among the shifting ice fields?

Hunger stalked the coast. The sole topic of conversation in all the yarangs was seal hunting. Fox trapping had lost its interest for many. Trapping was a good enough pursuit when a man had enough to eat. Pelts were bartered for merchandise. You could live without merchandise, but you couldn't live without food. Vaamcho was determined not to ask Alitet for any more meat. He had decided to try his luck in the distant patches of open water of which his father had spoken.

Early the next morning Vaamcho harnessed his four dogs to a light sledge and rode out to the ice fields.

It was still dark and the yarangs standing on the hillside were quickly lost to view. Vaamcho rode for a long time over the pack ice. Meanwhile the moon had risen, casting a pale radiance on the icy wastes, and the dogs ran on at a livelier pace. Presently Vaamcho espied from afar a patch of open water.

"That is where the seals are!" he thought, and the thrill of the hunt set his pulses beating.

"Chegit! Pot-pot!" he cried to the lead dog.

Chegit understood what his master wanted and turned right.

The team ran past a huge iceberg. Presently Vaamcho halted the team, climbed up onto an ice pack and surveyed the scene. A strip of calm open sea gleamed in the distance. Not a breath stirred at that early morning hour. A faint mist rose up from the sea. Vaamcho jumped down, resumed his seat in the sledge and, with a shout to the dogs, raced down towards the water.

"This will do," he said to himself. "I will hide behind this hummock. I will get a good view of the seals from here."

He drove the team off a little distance and came back to the edge of the ice. After having made all the necessary preparations he lit his pipe and settled down to wait. But he had hardly returned the tobacco tin to his pocket when a seal made its appearance. It swam out before his gaze like a vision, and Vaamcho's heart pounded with joy. He raised his rifle, but before he could take aim the beast suddenly vanished. Vaamcho stared hard and long at the rippling circles on the surface of the water, but soon they too disappeared.

"There are seals here!" Vaamcho thought, and a pleased smile spread over his face. He lit his pipe again, keeping the rifle ready on his knees.

Another seal came into view in the distance, only to disappear again instantly.

"What can that mean? Does the seal smell tobacco? Or does he scent the dogs? I think he does. There is an offshore breeze," Vaamcho debated with himself.

He went over to the dogs and moved them farther back, behind the iceberg. Returning to his place he

keenly searched the dark patch of water that lay before him. It was visibly growing wider.

A seal sailed majestically down the edge of the ice. It was heading straight for the hunter, its large, black eyes staring at him in curiosity. Its sparse whisker bristled above the water.

Vaamcho pulled the trigger and the inquisitive seal was dead. Vaamcho jumped up, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"I got him!" he cried jubilantly.

Vaamcho whirled his throw stick and threw it out over the seal, but the thong fell short. Vaamcho realized that the quarry was slipping out of his reach. Only now did he notice that the offshore wind had freshened. He walked back from the edge of the ice field and climbed an ice pack whence he looked out towards the land.

"There is a strong wind there, and the sky looks bad," he thought. He decided to turn back at once. He was very loath, however, to abandon the shot seal.

The sea was unruffled. It rose and fell in a gentle swell, which made the water look dense. In this black mass of water, faintly illumined by the moon, floated the carcass of the seal from which Vaamcho could not tear his eyes away.

Vaamcho took the coil of thong in his hand again, tied his belt to it and decided to attempt another throw. But the throw stick again fell short of the body. This time, however, it fell so close that the ripples which it raised in the water set the carcass rocking.

Vaamcho recalled the games he used to play at as a child, when he recovered floating sticks from the water by throwing stones the ripples from which drove the objects towards the shore. One had only to hit the water on the near side of the object.

Hoping in this manner to drive the seal towards him

Vaamcho began repeatedly hurling his throw stick at it. It began to fall quite close to the carcass, and Vaamcho eagerly awaited the moment when it would drop a little beyond. Then with what joy would he drive the prongs into the body and haul in his catch!

Suddenly Vaamcho noticed that the ice on which he stood was moving. He made a dash for the dog-team. A fissure had formed in the ice next to the iceberg and Vaamcho found himself being slowly borne away from the main ice field. The intervening space of water was too wide for even Vaamcho to take at a jump. He rushed from side to side vainly seeking a spot where he could jump across.

"The dogs—the dogs are left on the other side!" thought Vaamcho frantically.

He ran to the edge of the ice facing the spot where he had left the team and gave a loud whistle that awakened the echoes amid the icy wastes.

"Chegit! Chegit! Chegit!" cried Vaamcho.

The dog-team dashed out from behind the ice packs and raced headlong towards their master. The light sledge turned over and was dragged along by the dogs. Upon reaching the edge of the ice the dogs stopped. A wide strip of dark murky water separated them from their master.

"Chegit, come on! Come on, Chegit!" urged Vaamcho, slapping the sides of his skin boots.

Chegit looked at the water, whined, then ran along the edge of the ice, dragging the rest of the team along with him and nosing the ice as he ran.

"Now I am left alone. It is bad to be alone, ai, very bad!" thought Vaamcho. "With the dogs it is good, ai, so good!" He began calling Chegit again.

The lead dog, dragging the others after him, ran down to the edge again, looked over and set up a dismal howl.

"No, they won't go into the water. But they will be

cast adrift, too. They won't go home by themselves. Not without me. And then we'll drift on different floes."

Vaamcho's thoughts were all for his dogs, and they seemed to read them, their eyes fixed on their master's face.

"If I'm left alone, I shall live for four days, then shoot myself."

Vaamcho began calling Chegit again in desperation.

The sagacious animal dashed towards the water, gazed helplessly with lowered muzzle at the sheer edge of the ice crevasse and started back.

The call being repeated Chegit, with a great bound, leapt the fissure, but the other dogs had not moved and were dragging Chegit back, with the result that he hung suspended over the edge.

Vaamcho swiftly removed the coil of thong from his belt and adroitly flung his throw stick over the sledge. The prongs caught in the sledge, and Vaamcho began pulling both sledge and team into the water.

What a joy! Now he was no longer alone. Vaamcho quickly unhitched the dogs who instantly began rolling themselves in the snow. Their shaggy fur was covered with icicles. Vaamcho chipped off the icicles from Chegit's skin with his knife handle. The other dogs tore the ice out of their coats with their teeth.

The wind was rising. The moon sank behind the ice packs. Night fell.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Vaamcho lifted the sledge under his armpit and made his way slowly, with the dogs at his heels, towards a big ice pack. This would shelter them from the cold wind.

"Well, Chegit, the wind is getting rough and we must build ourselves a dwelling," said Vaamcho in a perturbed tone, addressing himself to the lead dog.

Vaamcho walked round the ice pack with a business-like air choosing a convenient spot. He started hewing the ice with his knife, digging deeper and deeper, working hard and doggedly, until he had fashioned a rude little shelter for himself and the dogs. Then he dragged the sledge into the ice hut and snuggled in himself with the animals. They would keep each other warm.

Vaamcho wanted to drink, but snow did not quench a man's thirst. He remembered the time when he had been about to cut his moustache off with a knife, but his father had stopped him, saying:

"Why are you cutting off your moustache? A hunter must take care of his moustache as he would of a good dog. It sometimes happens that a hunter goes for a long time without water, and his moustache makes water for him. The rime of fresh water clings to it."

Lying back on the sledge Vaamcho thought of his father's words of counsel, and the kind old face rose before him.

It was the dead of night. The wind howled amid the pack ice. Vaamcho, snuggling close to the warm bodies of the dogs, fell asleep. But not for long. Disturbing thoughts drove sleep away.

"How did it happen? The wind must have pressed on the pack ice, which acted like a sail. The ice farthest from the shore was first to give way."

Towards noon, when it grew a little lighter and the moon struggled out from behind the tumbled clouds, Vaamcho stepped outside. Taking his rifle and accompanied by the dogs, from whom he was resolved never again to be separated, he went over to the edge of the ice floe. He squatted down behind the cover of an ice pack and scanned the patch of open water. It was clear to him that no seals could be expected.

"One should not sit long out in the cold when there is nothing to eat," said Vaamcho, and got slowly

to his feet. "And the less a hungry man walks about the better."

As they drew near to their lair the dogs ran on ahead.

"I should not have gone out hunting," thought Vaamcho. "One must not hunt for thirty days when a person dies in the yarang. And my mother Ilineut froze to death only twenty-six days ago. I have broken the law, and the evil spirits have ensnared me."

Two days passed. There had been a jamming of the ice on the previous night which closed up the fissure. There were no seals about, and Vaamcho and the dogs were beginning to feel the pangs of hunger.

"We shall have to eat one of the dogs, Chegiti," said Vaamcho. "We could wait a little longer, but a hungry man is liable to freeze."

He took the dog Milyutalgyn by the collar and led him aside. The knife thrust in the heart was so swift and sudden that the victim had no time to utter a sound.

Vaamcho slaked his thirst with the hot blood and ate his fill of the warm flesh. He went back to the shelter and fed the dogs. He slept soundly that night.

In the morning he was awakened by a pale moonbeam that filtered through a crack in the block of ice that barred the entrance to the cave. Vaamcho jumped up, kicked open the "door" and went outside. A new fissure had formed nearby. The sea was calm, the wind had died down, and only a gentle swell gave a slight rocking motion to the ice floe.

Suddenly, quite close to him, Vaamcho saw a seal swimming by. He swiftly raised his rifle. The shot went home.

"Now we shall have plenty to eat!" cried Vaamcho delightedly.

Seals appeared at frequent intervals, and in a short

time Vaamcho had shot five of them and hauled their carcasses onto his ice floe.

"See how much food we have, Chegit? And we went and killed poor Milyutalgyn. If only we had waited a little longer!..."

Vaamcho lashed the seals together and hauled them to his lair. The dogs licked their chops in anticipation and gobbled up chunks of snow saturated with seal's blood.

"How much meat and fat," thought Vaamcho as he dressed the carcasses. "And when a man has plenty of meat and fat his heart sings."

Vaamcho decided to build a campfire. He took the bones of the seal, carefully scraped the flesh off them, split them down and laid them out cunningly with layers of dog's hair dipped in seal fat. He blew up the fire and soon it was crackling merrily.

"How many days, Chegit, have we not known what it is to laugh? And now laughter has come back again! It always comes with food. A belly filled with seal meat and hot water makes a man merry. Not so when there is nothing but wind in his guts."

The empty tobacco tin did duty as a teacup and Vaamcho drank with great relish the hot water that he had melted down from snow.

"Who knows, Chegit—maybe a white bear may turn up too. O-o! Then life will be as good as in a yarang!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Countless are the herds of Echavto. Incalculable are his riches. Where the herds of his reindeer have passed the moss will not grow anew for three warm summers. His reindeer are broken up into ten herds. In each herd there are twenty times twenty, another twenty times twenty, and again twenty times twenty—in all 1,200 head

in each herd. The reindeer of old Echavto cannot be kept in a single herd. They would famish for lack of moss and run away.

In each herd there were ten tents wherein dwelt the herdsmen with their families. Over a hundred people lived on Echavto's bounty.

Echavto permitted every herdsman to keep a few reindeer of his own. This gave the herdsman a sense of proprietorship, and he ran himself off his legs tending to his own and his master's huge herd which grazed together.

For three days now Alitet had been scouring the tundra in search of Echavto's herds, seeking in vain on his fleet-footed dogs amid the gorges and hills and the boundless plains. Unless a man be gifted with the scent of the wild beast he will never come upon the trail of these herds.

A wind blew over the tundra. It was so strong that the dogs could hardly stand up against it. Alitet brought the team to a halt and went down on all fours, searching the ground for spoor. He picked up some deer droppings and studied them. They would tell him how long ago the herd had passed this way. Alitet dug up the snow with his gee pole and examined bits of moss, grasses and osier leaves. They would tell him which way the reindeer herds had passed.

The dog-team sped on again athwart the wind. Presently the lead dog caught the scent of human habitation, swerved sharply to the left and spurted forward.

A figure loomed up in the dark. Alitet sharply reined in the sledge.

"Who is that?" he called out.

The man recognized the voice, went up closer and greeted Alitet by name:

"Alitet?"

"Yes, I am Alitet. Where do you come from?"

"I am Rento, a herdsman from Echavto's camp. It is a bad night. A night for wolves. Very bad. I cannot sleep. It must be hard for the men to guard the herd, so I am going to them to help. There are eight of my own reindeer in the herd."

"Is the herd far from here?"

"No, quite near. A man can run it in two sweats."

"And where do the yarangs stand?"

"Here, quite close. I'll show you."

And the herdsman ran ahead of the dogs.

"You run well," said Alitet when he drove into the camp.

"Yes, I run well," answered Rento, flattered by the praise.

"Is Echavto in this camp?"

"No. He is in another. Stay the night here. Maybe the snowstorm will be over tomorrow. Why forsake the warmth?"

"Is the other herd a long way off?"

"No, it's quite near. A man can run it probably in ten sweats. But spend the night here."

"No. You run on ahead and I shall follow."

"Ehei!" said Rento resignedly, and placing his staff on his shoulder, he ran out into the cold wind-swept gloom.

Rento soon disappeared from view and only the lead dog Charlie hung on his trail.

Now and again the herdsman stopped and shouted:

"Eheil" which meant: "Here I am!"

And then he ran on again in the pitch dark. At last he ran into the camp, stopped leaning on his staff for Alitet to come up, then said with a smile:

"Here are the yarangs. Now I will run off to the herd."

"Wait. Take some of this good tobacco for a smoke."

Rento was overjoyed.

"Have Echavto's men trapped many foxes?"

"Oh yes, very many!"

"Well, run off now!"

And Rento ran back.

As soon as it became known that Alitet had arrived the whole camp was set astir. Night seemed to have ended and people thought it time to be up and about.

Old Echavto had also woken up and lay on downy skins of reindeer, covered with a fox blanket. He called his four wives to him, and pulling at his long thin beard, issued instructions to them:

"Eipinga, you go outside and give Alitet meat. The worst we have. These men from the coast are mice eaters. They have no idea of good venison. All they know is to make a noise with their teeth and cram all sorts of rubbish into their shrivelled stomachs."

"You mean meat for his dogs, Echavto?"

"Yes, yes. These people eat the same food as their dogs. But do not give him too little—we do not want to get him offended. And you, Kima, go to Piliak and tell him to run to the herd and fetch the calf with the white stripe on its upper lip."

"Echavto! There is a heavy snowstorm. Will Piliak be able to find the calf among the herd?"

"Do as you are told, fool woman. Am I asking you to do more? He will find it. You, Keipa, light another burner. Light two burners. Echavto is not such a poor man that he should meet a guest in the dark—a trading guest at that! And there is work for you, too, Viya. Get out my fine doeskin trousers and get me inside them. Otherwise the guest may think me poor, seeing me in my own skin."

Alitet entered the yarang.

"You have come, Alitet?" said Echavto with demonstrative coolness.

"Yes," answered the guest carelessly and threw himself down on the skins, rubbing his chilled hands.

"And so the news has come to your ears that we need goods? We do not need much."

"Yes, the news has reached my ears. I have brought a few things. Some knives, and files, and bells for the reindeer, and needles, and rifles and tobacco. Just a few things."

The women threw up their hands, amazed at the lavish assortment of goods. Old Echavto was displeased at his wives' behaviour. He glanced at them sternly and they instantly effaced themselves. He himself listened to Alitet with little nods, denoting a tacit satisfaction, then said:

"Keipa! Must the guest speak with a dry throat? Where is the tea?"

Keipa, a dark-skinned young woman, as nimble as a fox, swiftly poured out the tea.

Alitet went out into the passage where his bag lay. He expected to have a drink tonight—he would have to drink a lot without losing his head. He groped about in the dark until he found a lump of butter which Charlie had given him specially for this purpose and swallowed it. The firewater would then simply burn his inside without making his head go crazy. For Alitet had not come all this way merely to have a good time.

He re-entered the yarang and tossed a handful of rusks onto the little table with the air of a benefactor.

Tea with rusks—food for the gods! The women uttered little cries of delight.

"Women are born gluttons," remarked Echavto. "The mad creatures would fain devour their own tongues together with the rusks."

"That is the food of the white men," said Alitet.

"Rotten food. I would not touch it." After a pause Echavto broached the subject of trade. "My men have also trapped a few red foxes," he said blandly.

"Yes, and white foxes and silver foxes too," blurted out that magpie Keipa.

"Hist!" snarled Echavto.

God only knows what she would be saying next if you did not stop her.

"What are you sitting there staring like owls?" he said to his wives. "Or do you think our guest must rinse his guts with water all the time? Or have you forgotten that a traveller requires solid food? Or do you think that Echavto has not enough food? Serve up the best food that can be found in my yarang."

The women scuttled off like mice to obey their lord's behest.

Indeed, they would spare no pains to please such an important guest. It was not every day that one met such men in the tundra.

Keipa ground the reindeer meat between her strong young teeth, set it out in a wooden bowl, mixed it with reindeer brains and rolled the grey mass into small patties which she then carried outside to chill.

The other wives were breaking up raw frozen meat with a stone hammer, cutting up cooked venison, taking out of the pot and laying out reindeer tongues and preparing a salad of green leaves, edible herbs and roots seasoned with seal fat. What a variety of rich and savoury dishes they prepared! It does not take four women long to serve up a variety of delicacies when there is abundance in the home!

Echavto said:

"Rank meat swells the stomach. My only food is the tongues of reindeer, light fat and the flesh of young calves. I have sent for a good calf."

After a slight pause, the old man enquired in a low eager voice:

"Have you any licker?"*

"I have. Alitet always has."

Echavto smacked his lips in anticipatory delight.

Alitet thought this an opportune moment to speak what was on his mind:

"Echavto, I have no reindeer. Live reindeer. I have no herd. We people on the coast are poor people. If there is hunting in the sea we have food. If there is no hunting we have no food. But you do not have to go out in the sea after the reindeer. That is why I wish to have a herd of my own."

The old man's face assumed a wary look and he said evasively:

"We here in the tundra are poor people too. Now the wolves devour the reindeer, now the pasturage gets covered with ice, now the herd gets taken with disease. You have none of these troubles on the coast. The wolves do not devour the seals and walruses. But we here have no end of these afflictions."

Echavto silently signed to his wives to serve the food. They lost no time over it and brought in bowl after bowl of different kinds of food. Echavto sampled each bowl himself before offering it to his guest. Alitet took a large reindeer's tongue which he hastily cut up and began swallowing greedily in great chunks. The tender meat fairly melted in the mouth. Keipa moved a bowl with the brain patties up to the guest. This holiday dish called *prerem*, was so delicious that one could almost swallow his tongue in eating it.

Alitet solemnly placed a bottle of diluted alcohol on the table. Echavto fondled the bottle with trembling hands.

"This firewater is good. It will not freeze in the severest frost." said Alitet as he poured out two mugs.

The women fell upon the rusks and began crunching them with great zest.

Alitet clinked mugs with Echavto. The latter gasped as the fiery liquid ran through his body, but he touched none of the food in order not to spoil the effect. He said:

"Why did you touch cups? Do you perhaps wish to become my marriage friend? Eh? Look how many wives I have!"

Alitet's head reeled at this pleasant turn in the conversation. He had long wanted to cement his business relations with Echavto by a marriage partnership. Nevertheless he feigned indifference to the subject and began to beat about the bush.

"I have a friend, the Merican. We always touch cups when we drink the firewater with him. You have to know the proper way of handling firewater—it is made in the land of the white men!... What you have said about our marriage partnership does my heart good. I have two wives now, Echavto. I shall soon have three. And I really see no reason why we should not form a marriage friendship and become nevtooms.

They drank a second mug and exchanged pipes.

The women began chattering in animated whispers. The compact had been sealed before their eyes. It only remained to see upon whom Alitet's choice would fall.

Alitet, assuming the tone of master, cried to the women:

"Bring in my goods."

The women quickly unloaded the sledge and brought the goods into the yarang. Echavto, already well in his cups, crawled about among the plugs of tobacco and bricks of tea and ran his fingers greedily over each article strewn on the floor.

"This is all for you, Echavto. I give it to you without counting it—all of it. For are you not my marriage friend, now, my nevtoom?"

"Hok! Hok!" crowed the old man. "All the pelts of

the foxes, white, blue and silver—all will I give to you without stint. And these goods now are all mine.”

Alitet drew out of his bag a brand-new Winchester, then a second, a third—ten in all! A whole heap of rifles.

“Hok!” exclaimed Echavto, all atwitter. “Hok! Grr! I shall give you an extra twenty reindeer from my herds for each of these rifles. Women, bring in the reindeer ear quickly. Let Alitet show how he wishes his reindeer to be marked.”

Keipa staggered into the yarang carrying a whole reindeer’s head. Alitet swiftly made two incisions on the tip of the ear.

“That is my mark, friend!” he cried and pulled out another bottle.

“Give here your cups, women!”

“Do not waste it on them,” interposed Echavto. “I shall keep it for later on.”

“I have plenty more for you, my friend!”

“Hok! Hok! Grr! Very well! Drink then, women!” cried the inebriated old man, crawling over the skins on all fours. Entirely overcome he presently lay huddled in a corner.

The drink went to the women’s heads. They began to sing. Their half-naked bronzed bodies with waving arms and shaking heads swayed in rhythm to the music.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The ice floes drifted shorewards. The wind had veered round and now blew from the sea. Vaamcho could no longer sleep. He paced back and forth across his little island all night with the dogs at his heels keeping a keen lookout on the shifting ice fields. A heady wind blew all night, rising in the morning to gale strength which began to drive the ice against the shore with terrific pressure.

"Chegit! Chegit! Look, there's land there, the coast!"

He ran alongside the sledge, helping the dogs to drag it.

The ice began to pack. Huge sheets reared up crushing against each other with an ominous crash. Man and dogs raced pell-mell for the safety of the beach, away from this appalling chaos of clashing ice and menacing sea.

Vaamcho stepped onto the beach at midday. The familiar sight drew from him a deep breath of relief. His eyes shone with joy.

Still incredulous of his hairbreadth escape, he dug up the snow to assure himself that there was land underneath. He yearned for the feel of earth in his hand.

Further inland he recognized the familiar contours of Cape Prkatagen. There, under the hillside, was human habitation. From here, riding on good dogs, it was one day's journey to Enmakai.

"Well, Chegit, now we are home!" cried Vaamcho gaily. "There's our settlement, beyond that hill. Now we can have a good long smoke."

Vaamcho sat down on a piece of driftwood and lit up his pipe.

Though he had few matches left he began to play with them, striking them against the box and throwing them about him. Vaamcho took a childish delight in watching the flying flames.

"I must leave myself one match," thought Vaamcho, then got up and started out.

He rode without stopping. The dogs ran on at an even pace, then suddenly dashed along at breakneck speed. Vaamcho felt a thrill of joy.

"That must be Enmakai," he thought.

Their flight was brought to an abrupt halt as both team and sledge pitched over a huge snowdrift in which the yarang lay buried almost to the roof.

Vaamcho entered the little passage.

"Who is there?" sounded the familiar voice of Tygrena.

"It is I," answered Vaamcho.

Old Vaal, in his haste to see his son, stumbled to his feet and got entangled in the hanging skins of the polog like a fish in the meshes.

A smile lit up the old man's wrinkled face.

"Vaamcho, is that you?" he asked.

Vaamcho crawled into the polog and sat down in silence facing his father.

The old man was first to break the silence.

"See, Tygrena is looking after the burner and has brought some fat...."

Tygrena gazed all the time at Vaamcho without uttering a word. She held in her hand a little stick for stirring the moss in the burner. Vaamcho said:

"Look Tygrena, how the burner is smoking. It wants tending."

Tygrena, with a flash of joy in her face, ran to do his bidding.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The people of the Enmakai settlement rejoiced at Vaamcho's home-coming as greatly as did the people in this land rejoice over every newborn child.

When Tygrena came home Korauge, the shaman, said:

"Chegit must be sacrificed to Kele, the Evil Spirit."

When Vaal heard this he sighed and said softly:

"Vaamcho, the dog Chegit must be sacrificed."

"I am sorry for the dog, father," said Vaamcho sadly.

"He helped to save my life. I will not kill him."

"What words are those, my son? They pain my heart. If Korauge hears of them the evil spirits will

forever haunt our yarang. And you have yet long to live."

Vaamcho went outside. In passing the dogs he averted his face, not to meet the eye of Chegit. "A dog, like a man, understands everything."

Vaamcho walked passed the yarangs and gazed at the icebound sea.

"I should have gone straight up to Chegit and taken him. Why put it off? Why did I come out here and walk past him?..."

Vaamcho pulled out his knife and passed his hand over the blade. It was sharp enough to shave a beard."

It was a bitter frost outside, but Vaamcho felt hot. He flung off his hat which hung down his back by the chin strap and with a heavy heart walked slowly over to the dogs.

Chegit lay curled up in a ball with his muzzle hidden under his belly. At the approach of Vaamcho the dog instantly raised its head, got to its feet and stretched its back, yawning and wagging a bushy tail.

Vaamcho went outside with it and walked on in silence. Upon reaching the end of the settlement he sat down on a snow bank. Chegit stretched himself at his feet. Vaamcho, with a swift movement, seized the dog's head, thrust it between his knees and raised the knife over the animal's heart. But Vaamcho's nerve failed him. He could not kill the dog. He stared at the glinting steel and flung the knife from him.

Chegit lay on his back in the snow with all four paws dangling lazily in the air.

Vaamcho's face grew dark and grim. "I am like a wolf! No, I am not a wolf, for this is Korauge's bidding which I am forced to do. No doubt he wants Chegit to be killed because I did not give him to Alitet. Kattam merkichkin!" he swore. "No, I am worse than a wolf.

A reindeer cannot be the friend of a wolf, yet Chegit is a friend to me!..."

Vaamcho got to his feet.

"Let us go over there, Chegit! Behind that little mound."

Vaamcho walked like a man who is ill. His feet stumbled in the snow.

He stole a glance at the dog following at his heels, and it seemed to him that Chegit was well aware of his intentions.

"Ai!" cried Vaamcho in a tone of deep anguish. He felt his heart would break.

Chegit raised his head and looked affectionately at his master.

Vaamcho suddenly felt that he could not endure that look. He turned away and stood for a long time without stirring. Then he spun round, seized Chegit by the muzzle and in the twinkling of an eye plunged the knife into the dog up to the hilt.

Vaamcho wanted to pull out the knife but his arms suddenly went limp, as though he had been rowing heavily. A big tear rolled down his cheek and froze on his chin.

Vaamcho took the head of the dead dog in both his hands and pressed his face to it. Dipping his finger in the dog's congealed blood Vaamcho drew a line with it across his forehead.

"Let the spirits be appeased!" he thought.

Vaamcho took hold of the dog by its hind paw and dragged it along the ground against the fur as custom demanded.

Suddenly he stopped.

"I will not drag it this way. I will take it my own way, custom or no custom."

He threw the body of Chegit onto his back and carried it to the yarang, holding it by the forepaws. It looked

as if the dog was embracing him from behind. Chegit's head swayed from side to side.

Striding on thus, whom should he meet but Korauge the shaman. Vaamcho walked past him in silence.

"Wretched man, he always wants to do things in his own way! Why does he carry the dog on his back?!" thought the shaman angrily.

Vaamcho laid the body of Chegit outside the yarang with its head facing the East, whence the sun rises.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Rifle shots rang out amid the pack ice. Every shot brought joy to men's hearts. The more shots the more meat would there be.

All over the fringes of the watery patches amid the ice fields sat hunters from the Emmakai settlement.

The bloodstained carcasses of two seals, shot through the head, lay beside Vaamcho. The latter, well pleased with the day's hunting, sat on an ice block, tapping his pipe against it. He wanted to smoke, but found that his tobacco tin was empty. After holding the pipe for a while between his teeth he ruefully put it away under his parka.

Vaamcho stepped over the broken ice to ask for some tobacco from a neighbour. He caught sight of Tygrena sitting near the water. At her side lay the carcasses of three shot seals.

"Kakomei, Tygrena!" Vaamcho cried joyfully. "Three seals! Why, you are a great hunter!"

"I missed the fourth one," she said, slightly abashed. Vaamcho sat down on a frozen carcass.

"Yes, I have tobacco," said Tygrena with a smile, and handed him a tobacco pouch sewn from reindeer skin. They both lit up.

"It is a fine day, Vaamcho."

"Yes, it is. But it is time to go home. I wanted to kill another seal but it looks as though I shall have to help you in getting your seals home."

"You are very good, Vaamcho! I would agree to become your wife."

Vaamcho was thrown into confusion, and in order to change the conversation he said:

"Korauge said that the seals dislike me, that their eyes do not wish to meet mine. But two seals looked at me and they are now lying beside my rifle."

"Korauge is a wicked man," said Tygrena with loathing. "He does not speak the truth. To listen to a man who lies is like drinking warm water. Even I like to look at you, not only the seals," she added with a smile.

After a pause Tygrena said in a low voice:

"Korauge kept saying all the time that the spirits do not like Vaal's yarang. Hineut froze to death and Vaamcho was carried out to sea. He said that Vaal should leave our settlement."

"And I did not get carried out to sea after all!" cried Vaamcho gaily. "Only I am very sorry for the dog. I often see Chegit in my dreams. He wags his tail, moves his legs and speaks to me with his eyes. Rather had I lost one of my eyes. A man may have one eye and still be able to hunt."

After they had smoked they got up and decided to go home.

They dragged the seals along over the ice. Vaamcho towed three seals behind him and Tygrena two. They walked on a long time in silence. Vaamcho's head was covered with hoarfrost and steaming.

Within sight of the yarangs the two hunters sat down on the carcasses to take a rest.

"There are the yarangs, Vaamcho," said Tygrena. "My legs refuse to take me thither."

"Alitet is a bad man?" asked Vaamcho timidly.

Tygrena replied with a silent nod.

"Vaal, my father, said that Alitet is a crafty and greedy man. He steals foxes from other men's traps. And my own mind tells me that he is wicked. I try to shun him when I see him."

"Your mind is similar to mine, as one seal is like another. I never knew what false people were before, and now I am becoming untruthful myself. Take one of my seals, Vaamcho, and I shall say that I shot only two."

"What hunter am I if I let a woman shoot seals for me. No, I cannot take it. Besides, Korauge would detect the lie. It will be bad for you."

"I do not care. Some day I shall probably lose my mind and cut Korauge's throat. And you shoot Alitet, Vaamcho. Lie in wait for him by the traps. Catch a silver fox and put it in your trap. Alitet will try to steal it. Then you can shoot him."

Vaamcho went pale. Never before had he heard such words.

"Tygrena, I am afraid of you."

"Fear not, Vaamcho. No one can hear us. A breeze is blowing from the shore. We shall speak together only out in the ice fields. No one must know our thoughts. Vaal is a kind man, but do not tell him. He will fear the shaman."

"I shall tell no one. Only I shall know it."

"Alitet is a thief. He steals whatever he can. He stole me, too, as he steals foxes from other men's traps. He left Aye all alone. Narginaut told me that he even killed his son and daughter to drive the sickness out of his foul body. I shall never become a real woman in his yarang."

Tygrena fell silent, then said with a sigh:

"I often think, Vaamcho—why is it that men may choose nevtooms and women not?"

"It is the law."

"Yes, it is the law," said Tygrena with a sigh. Then, after a pause, she added: "I want the father of my child to be a real man. Young, strong, agile and kind."

Vaamcho puffed at his pipe in silence.

"I would choose you to be my nevtoom," said Tygrena.

Vaamcho turned his head away in embarrassment and sent out a cloud of smoke. Tygrena laughed.

"Why are you like that, Vaamcho—as timid as a seal?"

"Maybe because I am poor."

There was a pause. Then Tygrena said softly:

"Vaamcho, but I must become a real woman! I want a child. I want you to be its father."

When she came home Tygrena caught the sound of Alitet's voice. He was conversing with someone in loud tones.

"A remkylen* has arrived," she said to herself.

Ever since childhood the arrival of a guest had always been a joyful occasion for Tygrena, but now she was indifferent. She was even loath to enter the polog.

The blithe spirit which she had brought back with her from the broad expanses of the ice fields and the joy of a successful hunt suddenly vanished. She wanted to smoke, but had left her tobacco pouch with Vaamcho. She slipped noiselessly out of the little passage and ran off to Vaal's yarang.

There she found nearly all the hunters of the settlement assembled. They were drinking tea, while old Vaal, reclining on a couch of skins, was telling them stories. How good life was here! Tygrena squatted down and began to smoke.

* A guest.—*Trans.*

The hunters finished their tea and begged Vaal to tell them another story.

"Make me a pipe!" said the old man.

The hunters all hastened to offer him their pipes.

"Why so many?" said Vaal with a smile. "One will do."

Slowly puffing at his pipe he began:

"I shall tell you about the beginning and birth of life. . . . There was a time when all the world was in darkness. On the rim of the night, there where the sun rises, sat the Maker, thinking how he could make light. He thought and thought, then created a crow and spoke thus to it:

"'Go and peck a hole to let the Dawn in.'

"And the crow flew to the East and began pecking with its beak. Then it came back to the Maker and said: 'I cannot break a hole through.'

"The Maker was angered. He seized the crow and threw it aside.

"'You are of no use, you do not love work. Begone! I shall not feed you! Seek your own food!'

"He made a little bird. The bird flew to the East and began to peck. It pecked so long until its beak was torn, but it made a little hole and flew back.

"'What have you done?'

"'I have pecked a little hole.'

"'Go and peck a bigger one.'

"The little bird flew back and began pecking again. Its beak was all torn, its body wasted and it lost all its feathers. But it pecked a big hole. The Dawn streamed through it and there was light in the world. The little bird walked back to the Maker, for it could not fly. There was no food on the way. The little bird wasted away still more, its bones grew very thin and it became still littler. But it came back to the Maker.

"'I have done it. It is now light in the world,' said the bird.

“‘Ah! Ah!’ said the Maker and he was very pleased.

“He put new feathers on the bird, sharpened what remained of its beak and gave it a dwelling beneath a mound, saying:

“‘Live and multiply!’”

Tygrena looked at Vaamcho. He smiled back at her.

“Then the Maker gathered the bones of seals about the earth and said: ‘Be thou men!’” Vaal continued. “The Maker created a white grouse and sent it into the world to see how people were living. The grouse flew down for a little while, then went back and said to the Maker:

“‘It is much too far, very bad. I could not reach it.’

“The Maker seized it by its tail and threw it into the willows.

“‘Live in the tundra. I shall not feed you. Seek food yourself.’

“Now, who could he send to find out what was going on on the earth?

“He made an owl.

“The owl went forth and reached the earth. It had big eyes that could see from afar. It saw four people—two men and two women. They stood on the earth and dared not sit down. The owl did not come back.

“‘How can I get news?’ thought the Maker.

“He made a fox and said:

“‘Go!’

“The fox went, but it did not reach the earth. It came back and said deceitfully:

“‘There is no earth, there are no people. People indeed! There is nothing but emptiness.’

“The Maker seized it and threw it aside.

“‘You are of no use, you deceiver! I know that there are people. Live in the tundra and let me never catch sight of you. I will flay you if I do!’

"The Maker sent down many beasts, including the white fox and the wolf.

" 'You good-for-nothings! None of you can bring me tidings.'

"And so he went himself. He met a man, took him by the shoulder and sat him down. Then he sat a woman down beside him.

"Then they began to multiply and became a tribe.

"The Maker made reindeer, walruses and seals out of the willows and said:

" 'Here is food for you. Kill them and live.'

Vaal cleared his throat and wound up:

"That is all!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Sad thoughts crowded into Tygrena's mind whenever she had to leave old Vaal's yarang.

The men who gathered here were real, warmhearted men and she felt at home among them, forgot for a while the hateful irksome life in Alitet's yarang. At times ugly thoughts beset her. More than once had she thought of shooting herself. Aye was far away and had no doubt already taken himself a wife, for there were girls in the hills too. Vaamcho alone, whom she now met often in the ice fields, helped to dispel her gloomy thoughts.

And now, as she returned to her yarang, her spirits sank again. She got into the polog with a heavy heart and saw Echavto, the old reindeer herder, of whom the men had spoken in Vaal's yarang.

"Tygrena! You have come?" the guest greeted her in a cracked old voice.

"Yes, it is I," she answered apathetically and began taking off her fur garments in silence,

She squatted down by the burner and began drinking hot tea in big gulps.

Old Echavto, Alitet's new marriage partner, sat talking with his nevtoom and the shaman. Here, too, firewater was being drunk to seal Alitet's friendship with the rich herder.

Alitet, elated by his business successes, was in a cheerful frame of mind. Like the other male occupants of the stuffy yarang he sat naked on the skins, except for a small reindeer pelt thrown over his knees.

The three men were intoxicated and sat discussing reindeer, furs and the skins of sea animals.

"Your herd, Alitet, will grow bigger year by year. When the calving season comes your herd will double," said Echavto.

"When summer comes I shall cut a lot of walrus thongs, prepare a stock of sea lions' skins and sealskins and then buy still more reindeer," said Alitet, voicing his cherished dreams.

"Quite right, Alitet! The nomad reindeer people have great need of those goods. You will receive two live reindeer for every skin of a sea lion, and one reindeer for every coil of walrus thong."

"I shall take more tea and iron articles from the trading yarang of my friend Charlie and use it all to buy more reindeer. Charlie told me that reindeer are not worth much, they are bred here and there is a lot of them in Chukotsk, whereas iron things, brick tea and tobacco are not produced here. Every iron thing fetches a high price. One iron pot is worth one reindeer, one knife a reindeer, one brick of tea a reindeer. Iron needles are not produced here either and are worth a lot. Our women have now forgotten the use of bone needles. Yes, Echavto, it is hard for a man to live these days without iron things. I shall help the nomad people with Tang things and you help me to make a big herd."

"Alitet, you are my friend. I have always told the reindeer people: Alitet is doing a great service to our hill folk. You go yourself to the hills and bring goods with you. You make the life of the hill folk easier," Echavto said ingratiatingly.

Korauge the shaman, who had hitherto been silent, suddenly spoke:

"My father had great herds of reindeer. But the spirits, whom he failed to appease, sent a blight on the herds and they perished. After that we moved to the coast and lived among the mice eaters. I was a small boy at the time."

"Korauge speaks truly," said Echavto.

"Yes, yes. It is a great truth. My father was a great herder, but he died here, on this coast, a poor man, a hunter of the sea beast. Now I have become friendly with the spirits. They do my bidding. And before I die I shall help you, Alitet, to make a big herd. And when I depart thither," he said pointing skywards, "I shall tell your grandfather—We have found your herds again."

Echavto's wizened face was covered with beads of sweat. His long beard was moist. Dashing the sweat from his face he said in a wheedling tone:

"My men are tending your herd well, Alitet. Not a single one of your reindeer will get lost from the fold or be devoured by the wolves."

"Echavto," said Alitet tipsily, "you are my dearest friend by wife. My first wife is now like an old seal. She has lost most of her fat and her skin hangs loose.... But my second wife...."

He chuckled and added:

"You have never seen anyone like her...."

Tygrena looked up startled and gave closer attention to the conversation. A little shiver ran up her spine.

She stole a glance at old Echavto and was overcome by a sudden impulse to rush out of the yarang.

And when Alitet said that Echavto would take his place that night, the colour receded from Tygrena's face and she said in a fierce whisper:

"I won't!"

The sudden outburst left Alitet dumbfounded and bereft of speech.

No one in his yarang had yet violated the customs of his people. Echavto smiled wryly. So great was Alitet's wrath that he could think of nothing better to do than hastily dress himself and rush out of the yarang.

Echavto crept up to Tygrena like a crafty old wolf.

"The young beast is always frightened and snarls. But when it gets accustomed it will eat out of your hand."

Echavto sidled up closer and laid a bony hand on Tygrena's shoulder.

Tygrena pushed him fiercely from her, and the old man went flying onto a pile of skins in the far corner.

At that moment Alitet came in. Echavto, with a sardonic grin, murmured:

"The little she-cub bites, it seems! Like the untamed young roe in the herd that will not let herself be lassoed."

Alitet walked over to Tygrena in silence and gave her a kick. Her eyes gleamed with hatred. She crouched into a corner, her teeth clenched and eyes blazing like a trapped animal.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Tygrena lay awake that night. She lay thinking of her childhood, and the games she had played in Yan-rakenot, she remembered her father and her poor young betrothed Aye and Vaamcho. She buried her face in the deerskin and wept softly. These were the first tears in her young life.

The drunken men slept heavily. It was hot and stuffy in the polog. Without lighting the burner Tygrena found her torbazes and fur garments in the dark and slipped out noiselessly into the passage.

The cold air acted bracingly and Tygrena hastily began dressing herself for a journey.

Suddenly she remembered that she had forgotten her knife and crept back for it into the inner apartment.

Tygrena had made up her mind to run away, to go back to Yanrakenot, to her father Kamenvat. She ran swiftly down the hillside and sped on as fast as her legs could carry her without once looking round. Hot and panting she reached the adjacent hill and stopped. The night was on the wane. The moon seemed to have tumbled from the roof of the sky onto the ice packs. Dark, threatening clouds crept across the sky. The moon was encircled by a ring of orange, the precursor of a blizzard.

It was the moon of the Stubborn Old Bull, and the moon of the Freezing Udder was setting in. Tygrena looked around and thought: "There will be a heavy blizzard.... But I shall not go back, never!..." And she sped on again. Now and then she stopped to rest. She had already covered a considerable distance. Were it daylight the hill on which the Enmakai settlement stood would not be visible from where she was. But strange to say her legs did not feel at all tired. Her heart beat fast, but it was from joy and not from running. She ran on for a long time, keeping to the coast line, but imperceptibly to herself gradually struck off into the tundra. Suddenly Tygrena became aware that the familiar landmarks had disappeared. She had lost the trail and did not know how far she had strayed from the coast. Turning sharply to the direction of the sea she ran on again. A hare darted out of the willows. Its sudden appearance

startled Tygrena. But the hare as suddenly stopped dead in its tracks, looked at Tygrena, then made off in a flash.

"Wait for me, little hare!" Tygrena cried out loudly. "Let us run together!"

She had cried out in order to drive away her fear. The sound of her own voice in the dark wilderness cheered her.

The hare had vanished. Tygrena felt a stab of panic at the realization of her loneliness amid a landscape that was no longer familiar to her eyes.

Tygrena climbed the slope of a hill and surveyed the scene around her. The mountains rolled away endlessly in the distance. Tygrena anxiously scanned their dim contours, then suddenly uttered a cry of joy:

"Why, that is the Walrus Head mountain! The one my father Kamenvat told me stories about when he took me as a child on a visit to the reindeer people."

Cheered by what she had seen Tygrena ran confidently down the stony hillside towards the sea. Suddenly she remembered that she had forgotten to take her pipe and tobacco. That was worse than the blizzard. Meanwhile the blizzard had sprung up in all earnest. Fierce gusts of wind swept low over the ground. The sky was black and blotted out the stars.

"One must not walk about in a blizzard," thought Tygrena, remembering the stories she had heard narrated by the old hunters. "It is best to sit and wait for it to blow over. A blizzard is not dangerous to him who does not fear it."

Tygrena found a spot to shelter her from the storm. Barely had she dug herself in when the snowflakes were whirled up in the air by a boisterous wind. The storm broke and howled about her.

Tygrena crouched deeper into her lair. She tied her sleeves about her wrists and pulled her head into her

parka. A pleasant warmth stole through her body. She curled up and went to sleep.

The blizzard was soon over. After two days the sky cleared, the stars shone out, and Tygrena crept out of her shelter. The pangs of hunger and thirst assailed her. Hunger made her senses keener.

Tygrena decided to look for fox traps set with walrus bait. She knew where the hunters set their traps. Her search, however, was fruitless. At last she found a rusty old trap on a chain beneath a little mound, but there was no bait in it. After a long search she finally caught sight from afar of a white fox who was going round in circles on one spot. The fox had its paw caught in a trap and was endeavouring to shake it free. Next to it lay a lump of seal flesh. The frightened animal had not even touched the bait. It must have been spinning about a long time, for its trapped leg was broken and the injured limb was held in place by the bare skin.

Tygrena strangled the fox, set the trap again and laid the dead fox beside it. The meat bait was frozen so hard that her knife could not cut it. Tygrena with difficulty chipped off several pieces of the meat and hungrily swallowed them.

She would have liked to slake her thirst with the hot blood of the fox, but did not want to spoil the skin.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

It was an unusual day in Yanrakenot. The only talk in all yarangs was of Kamenvat's wife, who had "given her word" and was making preparations for her journey to the dwellers of the Upper World.

She had been ill for many days. Her arms and legs were swollen. Her face wore a look of utter apathy. An

evil spirit was haunting Kamenvat's yarang, and life in it had become very hard.

The neighbours, fearing the evil spirits, shunned this dwelling, and only Aye would sometimes leave a piece of meat or a little fat in the passage. Kamenvat himself never stepped outside his yarang lest he bring trouble on his fellow tribesmen.

The sick old woman realized the sorrow and pain she was causing her kinsfolk.

"Why burden people's lives?" she thought. "Why, when there is such a thing as honourable and voluntary death?"

And all the people in the settlement looked at it in the same way. Everybody agreed that it was best for the old woman to join the people of the Upper World of her own free will. But every person is the master of his own life. And so everyone waited until the old woman herself would ask for death.

One morning, when Kamenvat was lighting the burner, he heard the voice of the old woman.

"Kamenvat, I must go. It is time. I can tarry no longer. I gave this word yesterday in my thoughts and now I give it with my tongue."

"Had you not better wait a little longer? Maybe the evil spirits will quit our yarang and you will not have to leave me all alone?" said Kamenvat wistfully.

"No," the old woman replied firmly. "I have thought a lot yesterday. I did not sleep at all last night, preparing myself to say 'the word.' I now say once more—it is time for me to go to the dwellers of the Upper World."

Kamenvat decided to send for Tygrena. Alitet, too, should be present to help a person on her journey to the Upper World.

While they were discussing the coming event someone in the passage made known his presence by a cough.

"Aye, is that you who have come?"

"No, it is not Aye. Tygrena has come."

"What do my ears hear? Is it an evil spirit that has come to torment me?" Kamenvat whispered to the old woman. "Did you not hear that voice too?"

"Yes, I heard it. No doubt Tygrena's heart has spoken to her about my 'great day'."

Kamenvat hastily lifted the skin of the polog, peered out into the passage and cried:

"Tygrena!"

"Yes, it is I," she said wearily.

Tygrena crawled into the polog and suddenly recoiled at the sight of her mother's ravaged face. She had heard that her mother was ill but had not thought it was as bad as this.

Silence fell upon the yarang. All its occupants were miserable, each in his own way. And none dared break the silence first.

At length the mother spoke:

"You have come, Tygrena. You have done well. Today is a 'great day' for us. Lay out that new skin for Alitet."

Tygrena shook her head in silence.

"Alitet is not here. He is not wanted. He is in Enmakai. . . . I ran away from him. . . ."

Kamenvat stared at Tygrena and cried in consternation:

"What do I hear? Or has Kele come to dwell in my ears?"

Kamenvat's voice dropped as he went on weakly:

"Tygrena, what will be now? None of our people has ever done this before. Or was it the evil spirits that pointed out to you the way of flight? You must go back at once."

"No, Kamenvat, I shall not go back. Even a mouse has a heart, and a mouse can become enraged," returned Tygrena.

"How much woe is mine! Why must one man have so much!"

The sick old woman made no comment on her daughter's conduct. She would not be here to mend it. She was past caring. Her only thought was the "word" which she had given that morning.

"People, make haste! My time has come. Hurry, or I shall be late!" the old woman muttered in great agitation.

Preparations were hastily made for the "last tea." A walrus thong was brought out. The only article of the ritual that was missing in the house was a reindeer fetus for putting round the woman's neck. And most important of all, another intimate person was lacking to attend the ceremony.

Tygrena hung the kettle over the burner and went outside.

She stood in the doorway of the yarang. People were walking about, but none approached the yarang of Kamenvat. They greeted Tygrena from a distance.

Aye caught sight of Tygrena.

"O, kakomei, Tygrena!" he cried excitedly and ran up to her.

"Aye, it is death's day in our yarang. And a member of the family is missing whose voice my mother might hear for the last time. You are the only one who still dwells here," she said pointing to her heart.

"Tygrena, let her hear my voice," said Aye quickly.

"We have no reindeer fetus to wrap about her neck."

"I have two," said Aye. "I shall run and get one."

"Wait, Aye! There is great sorrow in our yarang."

Aye looked puzzled and said:

"Have our people ceased to consider it a great joy when one of them hurries to join the dwellers of the Upper World?"

"I mean sorrow for Kamenvat," said Tygrena.

Aye stood looking at her in perplexity.

"My wits must have dried in my head. I understand nothing."

"Last night . . . I ran away from Alitet," whispered Tygrena.

All Yanrakenot was petrified at the news.

In every yarang and every polog Tygrena was on everyone's lips. Her conduct was regarded as an ill omen. Tygrena's flight even eclipsed the importance of such an event as the voluntary death of Kamenvat's wife.

When all the preparations were completed the "last tea" was set out. There were four occupants of the yarang—the old woman, Kamenvat, Tygrena and Aye. They squatted down in a semi-circle while Tygrena, overcome with emotion, poured out the tea. Tea it was not, but a herb gathered in the distant tundra which the local inhabitants used to brew before the white traders came to the coast. It was drunk without sugar. The parting day had to be such as it was years before any white man set foot on Chukotsk shores.

The old woman sat up dressed in a new fur garment and new deerskin torbazes. These clothes had been prepared well in advance. Those who were "remaining behind" were dressed in their ordinary clothes—Tygrena in a loin cloth, Kamenvat and Aye in light skin trousers.

Tea was drunk in utter silence. Presently the old woman leaving her tea unfinished passed her cup to Tygrena, saying:

"Enough, people. Tygrena, take my cup for yourself. You have still a long time to drink tea in."

The tea things were quickly cleared away and the old woman was moved to the middle of the apartment.

Her face wore an expression of utter indifference and resignation. It was as though she had already set out on her journey, leaving behind her forever the burden of this world's strife and cares. She looked at her dear

ones with unseeing eyes. No one ever more heard her voice. The old woman dropped silently onto the reindeer skin and shut her eyes.

Tygrena, stifling her sobs, wrapped the skin of the unborn roe about her mother's neck. Kamenvat placed the noose of the thong over the skin and Aye sat astride the old woman's knees and gripped her hands in his, pinning them down to the floor. The noose was drawn taut.

From outside came the long, dismal howl of the dogs.

The corpse was carried to the hills and laid out on the stones. Kamenvat slit open the garments to afford easy access to the body for the beasts and birds of prey. Tygrena placed beside the body a teacup and saucer, a needle and some thread made of reindeer tendons.

A sledge drawn by a team of powerful dogs swept into view on the hill crest. It was Alitet come in pursuit of Tygrena.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Chukotsk Peninsula, remote as it was from the centres of culture, had been cut off from civilization for centuries. People's lives here were governed by unwritten laws. Superstition was man's constant companion from the cradle to the grave. For all that, the character of this people was conspicuous for bravery and endurance.

Here, in the middle of the 17th century, came an ordinary Russian Cossack, Semyon Dezhnev, in quest of new discoveries. Long before Vitus Bering, Dezhnev, in his frail boats, rounded the northeastern point of the Asiatic mainland—the Chukotsk Cape.

For more than a century thereafter the Russian Cossack explorers exacted from the refractory Chukotsk tribes an unwilling fealty to the Russian tsar.

Neither firearms nor cold steel could conquer these people. They were conquered by Russian tobacco, iron knives, axes, loaf sugar, spirits and other Russian wares shipped by Russian merchants from Yakutsk.

At the close of the 19th century, with the opening of a regular steamship line from Vladivostok, the first Russian governor of the Anadyr Region, Dr. Grinevitsky, came to this country.

Having made the acquaintance of the people he forwarded a request to his superiors to be allowed to call himself doctor instead of governor, since the Chukchi, in his opinion, were a free people who were not yet accustomed to the idea of authority.

Somewhat earlier, in 1867, Alaska, discovered and explored by Russians, was sold by the tsarist government to the United States.

From that time American whalers became frequent callers on Chukotsk shores, where they started trading operations on both sides of the Bering Strait.

"Take the whales but leave us the walruses. We must have something to hunt as well," the Chukchi said to the whalers. "You throw the walrus carcasses back into the sea all the same. You only need the tusks. Better let us give you the tusks."

Close on the heels of the whalers came the smugglers' schooners, buying up expensive furs for a mere song.

Representatives of Russian and foreign capital settled on the coast in their scramble for "pelts". In addition to the Russian merchants Danes, Norwegians, Americans and Englishmen had made their home here. Easy money was the sole object of these newcomers.

Such, too, was the object of Mr. Thompson who had settled down on these promising shores. For the past few years, ever since 1917, Charles Thompson keenly followed the American newspaper reports about the

Russian revolution. The true import of these events, however, Mr. Thompson failed to grasp.

The Great October Revolution was plucking up the roots of the ancient regime in Russia, and its reverberations were but faintly borne to these distant shores.

Aye's extraordinary behaviour during the sale of the silver foxes and the appearance on the coast of some Russian partisan had put the American on his guard.

The spring of that year, 1923, was more than usually beautiful on the Chukotsk coast. The air was clear and limpid, and only the distant rumble of the sea disturbed the immense silence.

In the heart of the tundra the snow and ice had begun to melt, revealing thawed patches of earth here and there, and the Arctic sparrows had begun their migration back home. They flew about the still snow-clad tundra in search of food, bathed by the warming rays of the sun, their merry twitter sounding a note of life in the vast wilderness.

These harbingers of the Arctic summer, it would seem, had arrived too early. Yet they found food among the willows, in the river valleys and on the reindeer tracks. They nested hastily, the sooner to hatch their broods and fly off with them.

The ground squirrels, too, had awakened after their long winter's sleep. These nimble little animals crept out of their burrows and frisked about in the sun, running cautiously from one hole to another and scuttling away underground at the slightest hint of danger.

The shimmering air played tricks with objects which it distorted to huge dimensions, and from afar the ground squirrels could be taken by an inexperienced eye for running figures of human beings.

The smooth white snow still lay all around in a dazzling carpet. The sun hung in the skies morning and night.

Mr. Thompson turned over in bed when his American alarm clock went off with a shrill ringing. Charles Thompson buried his head under the pillow. The alarm went off again, and again Mr. Thompson buried himself in the pillows. The clock made six separate attempts to wake its owner.

Oh, it was a wonderful contraption, was this alarm clock!

Mr. Thompson played hide and seek with it until he grew fully awake.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. This, since 1901, when he had first come to this country, was Mr. Thompson's invariable hour of rising.

He got out of bed, his feet resting on a bearskin, and looked about him. The room was in darkness, save for a thin ray of light that streamed through a small hole in the heavy blind. It looked in the dark like a brilliant thread drawn from the upper part of the solitary window to the rocking chair that stood against the opposite wall.

The sight of this luminous thread suddenly irritated Mr. Thompson.

"Goddam these creatures! Twenty years of training hasn't taught them a thing! You could teach a damned seal to do almost anything in that time," he growled, and without getting off the bed, suddenly sang out:

"May!"

A middle-aged woman entered the room. Accustomed as she was to her husband's ways, Rultyna, with the soft swift movement of a squirrel in its burrow, glided in the dark towards the window to open the blind, but her husband stopped her.

"Wait! Do you see that hole through which the sun comes into my room?"

"Yes, I see it."

"That is careless! I do not want anything to disturb

my sleep. You are not looking after the house properly," grumbled Mr. Thompson.

Rultyna heard her white husband's rebuke out in meek silence. She simply could not understand what Charlie wanted. Could he not see how real men slept out in the snow on dog sledges under all the rays of the sun!

"You may open the blind now," said Mr. Thompson.

The dazzling sunshine poured through the small window into the low-ceilinged little room, revealing a bed, a table, a makeshift bookcase and two cane chairs. On an overturned box in a corner stood a shining gramophone with a huge horn which was played only on Sundays.

The top shelf of the bookcase was occupied by the books of Jack London and the posthumous works of Wedsley. On the middle and lower shelves lay piles of American newspapers and magazines, all of them a year old. They had been delivered by last summer's schooner together with a cargo of native merchandise, and constituted Mr. Thompson's spiritual food. The periodicals and papers were neatly arranged in chronological order and Mr. Thompson read them consecutively, as though they had been delivered by that day's mail. The dates coincided except for the year. Mr. Thompson had every opportunity, if he wished to, of looking farther ahead, but being a man of careful and calculating habits he preferred not to take a premature interest in the world's affairs. And so Mr. Thompson was exactly one year behind the civilized times.

The little hut, which he had himself built out of packing cases, might easily have been replaced by a real house. He had but to say the word and the firm he dealt with would deliver him a house by the next boat.

But why should he? It was not as if he intended spending the rest of his life here. This little room was

good enough at a scratch. What was the sense in throwing away good dollars?

Rocking himself in the chair Mr. Thompson finished his morning pipe, then pulled himself up ponderously and went over to the handmade calendar. He struck out yesterday's date—May 16, 1923. Putting the pipe away in the pocket of his checked shirt he crossed to the bookcase and took a newspaper for May 17, 1922.

His wife re-entered from the little anteroom in which his family lived carrying the breakfast things. She placed on the table a coffee pot, a plate of bacon, some white bread baked over an oil lamp and sugar and silently withdrew.

Mr. Thompson sat down to the table with the "fresh" newspaper in his hand. He was to read what had happened in the world a year ago.

True, the news he was to learn had been the latest news for the crew of the schooner a year before. But Mr. Thompson had forbidden the ship's men to give him the latest news. Life had to run on methodically and smoothly, without leaps and bounds.

Mr. Thompson, with the paper up in front of him, was enjoying his third mug of Corona coffee when he suddenly brought the mug down on the table with a bang, dropped the newspaper and took off his horn-rimmed glasses. He wiped the glasses with a corner of his shirt and hastily put them on again.

He read the paper again, tensely bent over the table. His face drained slowly of colour. Presently he pushed the paper from him, jumped up from his seat and began pacing about the room, waving his smoked-out pipe.

"Well, I'll be damned! That's a bit of news for you! Some news, dammit!"

Mr. Thompson paced feverishly up and down the room, filling his pipe with Prince Albert tobacco.

Puffing furiously at his pipe Mr. Thompson rushed up to the table and reread the item of news that had thrown him out of his customary composure. It briefly stated that the Soviet Government had granted the North Company a concession to conduct trade among the population of Kamchatka, the Chukotsk Peninsula and the Anadyr Region and invited men with a knowledge of Russian and those able to work a rudder motor to apply for jobs.

For the past twenty-two years no item of news, not even the news about the revolution in Russia, had stirred him so greatly as this year-old report.

"The North Company! Why, the average businessman doesn't stand a dog's chance with a shark like that in the field!"

And as though in self-warning he exclaimed:

"One only has to remember how ruthlessly the North Company squeezed out and ruined even the big and most enterprising men on the Hudson Bay!"

The unusual mental effort left Mr. Thompson exhausted. He took up the newspaper and deposited his bulk into the rocking chair.

He read the distressing item again, then flung the paper away from him and let his head, with its sparse and rumpled growth of reddish hair, drop onto the back of the old rocking chair.

Now he was determined to stay on. He would yield this territory to no one.

"Oh, I'll have the ball at my own feet, see if I don't!"

Nevertheless, the thought of an incursion by the North Co. made him shudder. He knew this company's bag of tricks only too well. This powerful firm with its huge private fleet would lose no time in capturing the market. They would begin by working at a loss and then start raking in the money.

"May!" yelled Mr. Thompson.

And when his wife timidly entered in response to his call he bellowed:

"Whisky!"

Rultyna promptly obeyed, though not without wonder. She had never known Charlie take whisky in the morning after his coffee. Rultyna could not remember a similar precedent in all their twenty years of married life. Her husband's conduct that morning alarmed her. She decided that Charlie was going out of his mind.

Mr. Thompson swallowed a stiff dose. Suddenly a thought struck him and he slapped his forehead:

"Dammit! I've still got Alitet! And with Alitet by me I've got the whole say here—I'm the law and I'm the politics! I can give out advances through him and buy up all the furs off the stump. Ha-ha-ha! I'll steal a march on the North Company. It can buy up the ducks' eggs if it wants—there won't be anything else for it to buy. I guess they won't like that very much!"

Mr. Thompson pictured to himself the company's big steamer arriving with its holds full of merchandise and not being able to buy a single pelt. Alitet would buy up all the furs in advance. It didn't matter if Mr. Thompson brought off this operation at a loss. It didn't matter if his account with the Washington bank showed no increased balance this time. Talk about competition!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Mr. Thompson's family, consisting of his native wife and six children, lived apart in a skin polog set up in the chilly anteroom adjoining his own room. They lived in the Chukchi way, using the moss burner to heat and light their apartment, sleeping on reindeer skins and feeding on the cheap meat of the walrus and seal. The upkeep of his family did not put a great strain on Mr.

Thompson's pocket. Yarak, whom Mr. Thompson had adopted as a boy and who now served him in the capacity of handy man, lived together with the rest of the family.

The eldest girl, Mary, was already nineteen. Mr. Thompson figured out that she had long since more than earned her keep by sewing clothes. Mary's mode of life differed little from that of the other native girls in Loren. She shared the same interests, had the same thoughts and spoke only Chukchi. Her European cast of features, however, with her large black eyes fringed with long eyelashes gave her a very attractive appearance. Mr. Thompson gave her more of his attention than he did his other children. He dressed her in the finest fur garments made of young marbled deerskins. Mary was privileged to come into his room more often than the other children. Mr. Thompson was even somewhat proud of his daughter.

Mary's mother had often broached with her the subject of marriage. This was a thing they could only discuss in private, for Charlie would not hear of it. Rultyna could not understand the white man.

Did not the white man realize that a grown up girl had to have a husband to be the father of her children? Was it not the dream of every girl to become a mother? Was not that what girls were born for? And why could not the white father and white husband understand that?

But Mr. Thompson had his own views on the subject. He never for a single moment entertained the idea of his daughter possibly presenting him with a native son-in-law.

Mary and little Ben of all the six children were indubitably his own offspring. The others were born of his marriage friends, and there was not a single feature of the white man in their appearance. Mr. Thompson realized that Mary would have to marry. But who was to

be her husband? There was not an eligible man on the whole coast. Unless some sailor from one of the passing steamers would take her. But who would take a girl who didn't know the language to America? Besides, Mary did not have the faintest notion of how to behave in civilized society.

Mr. Thompson decided to keep a lookout for a likely candidate among the seamen who could be persuaded to marry Mary on the promise of taking over his business. He was nothing loath to marry her off to an old man, so long as he was white.

The philandering crews of the whalers and smuggler schooners would live with the native girls when they came ashore and desert them when their ships sailed back. Mr. Thompson remembered how the crew of a wintering schooner had once married Chukchi girls and then abandoned them when the nautical season opened. The girls hurled themselves from the cliff and were killed.

Mary did not want a white husband. Even the best white man she knew—her father—evoked no good feelings in her. Such was the result of her mother's influence.

All Mary's girl friends in Loren and other encampments had already become real women and had children of their own. Mary had not yet known that happiness. And her future, too, was still obscure. Mary grew sullen and bad-tempered and disrespectful towards her father.

Her mother thought to herself: "Yarak is a good, strong hunter. It would be good if Mary married him, but then he is not white."

Twenty years' schooling in Charlie's home had taught Rultyna reticence and mute submission, and she knew better than to broach that subject with her husband. She always waited for Charlie to speak first.

But Charlie sat in his den, and what his thoughts were sitting there nobody could tell. Charlie was an unsociable man. His talks with the natives were strictly confined to business. At home he talked only to his documents. Rultyna, peeping through the crack, saw him turning over his papers and smiling to them, as though they were something better than human beings.

Rultyna conceived a hearty dislike for these papers and when she tidied up the room she would give them a vicious flick with her duster.

She preferred to see him casting looks on some young Chukchi woman. Charlie became human then. His eyes would light up with a spark of life and his silent lips open in a smile that revealed a mouthful of shining iron teeth. He would invite the woman into his room and lock the door. The woman left him with a packet of chewing gum. Charlie was very kind-hearted. Sometimes he gave the woman a whole packet of cartridges as a gift for her husband.

White-faced infants were born in the Chukotsk settlements. They presented a striking contrast to the other children, but they enjoyed the great love and affection of their parents and everyone else in the settlement. People rejoiced at the birth of every new child and did not bother their heads about whose it was. What did it matter, so long as the child grew up to be a hunter and a real man?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A pestilence had struck the coast. Some extremely malevolent spirit, men said, was haunting the Kamenci settlement. People dropped dead before each other's eyes. They had no strength to drag their feet along and froze to death in the unheated yarangs. Even the shamans froze to death.

Everybody in the yarang had died. Only one little boy was left—Yarak. Terrified, he had run away to a neighbour's yarang. Here, too, people lay stiff and cold, like stones. He called and called but no one answered him. Terror seized him. He ran from yarang to yarang, but everywhere people were silent.

Yarak wandered down by the seashore, not knowing where he was going. He stumbled on, munching frozen seal meat. Eventually he was picked up by some hunters and taken to their encampment. But when the boy told his story the people took fright. He carried the evil spirit in him. They gave him food and told him to go away. And wherever he went people told him to go away at once.

Mr. Thompson was not afraid of the evil spirits and he took Yarak into his house. The boy grew up in Charlie's family, looked after the dogs and helped about the house. Later he went out hunting and trapping. Mr. Thompson was pleased with his adopted son.

One day, however, Mr. Thompson caught Mary looking at Yarak in a way he did not like. Mr. Thompson said:

"I have saved your life, Yarak! Now you have grown to be a real, strong man. I have sent you out with the whalers to help the white men. You have learned to work with skill. Henceforth you may live among the Chukchi, your own people. I shall tell Rynteu that you will live in his yarang. When I need you for work I shall send for you."

Yarak had not expected that. He had worked so well and tried so hard!

He stared at Charlie in bewilderment and faltered:

"Charlie, let me make a separate yarang and live in it together with Mary. I want to marry...."

"Wha-at?!" roared Mr. Thompson. "You are mad. What was that you said, goddam you? Have you ever

heard of the daughter of a white man marrying a savage like you? You fool! That will never be! Take your skins at once and clear out! Begone from my house! Don't you ever come near this house again. Such is the law of the white man."

Yarak took his reindeer skins and went to Rynteu's yarang.

"What white man's law is that?" mused Yarak. "For three summers Charlie sent me to hunt whales with the white men. I have learned to speak their language but I never heard of such a law. The ship's cook himself told me: 'You marry Charlie's daughter, she is a fine girl!' Every white man makes his own law. What strange people!"

Yarak stood for a long time in the passage of Rynteu's yarang before he could summon up courage to go in. It was a disgrace for a man to be driven out. People might laugh at him. Yarak hesitated long before he gave the cough that would announce his presence. He wondered whether he had not better cut his throat. Yarak groaned in anguish.

The head of Rynteu was thrust out of the polog.

"Come in, Yarak, come in!" said the host warmly.

"Rynteu, Charlie has driven me out! He sent me to stay with you."

"Good. Stay here. There is plenty of room. We shall receive the trading men together. It is jolly here. You know yourself that my yarang is the receptacle of all the news along the coast."

Old Rynteu with all his chattels belonged lock, stock, and barrel to Mr. Thompson. He had been living under Charlie's wing for nearly twenty years. Rynteu's wife had paid frequent calls on Charlie. How many gifts she had brought back from him! And Rynteu himself Charlie had presented with a rifle. O, how happy Rynteu had been! For not everyone got such gifts!

Rynteu appreciated Charlie's kindness and would never forget it.

Hunters and trappers came often to Charlie to trade even from places where the merchant Brukhanov kept his trading yarang. And they always put up in Rynteu's yarang. Rynteu took care to make a stock of food in the summer for the traders' dogs. He spent all his time hunting. Charlie, too, used to buy some extra meat in the summer and dump it in Rynteu's meat hole. One needed a lot of food for the dogs over the winter. So Rynteu lived and worked for Charlie.

He had had a large family, but they had all died, except one daughter who kept house for him.

So when Yarak came to his yarang with his sleeping skins Rynteu was overjoyed. And no wonder! Was not Yarak a strong, healthy young man? Indeed, Rynteu was nothing loath to have him for a son-in-law.

Rynteu fussed around him and did his best to please him.

"Why is there sorrow on your brow, Yarak?"

"Hold your peace, Rynteu, if you do not want me to give you a good hiding."

"Oh!" said Rynteu, surprised. "Very well. By all means I shall hold my peace."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Mr. Thompson was so deeply preoccupied with his plans of warfare against the North Co. that he forgot his usual after-coffee constitutional which consisted of four walks between his house and the beach. It was already noon, but Mr. Thompson had not yet made his appearance.

Worried by her husband's peculiar behaviour Rultyna came into his room and said quietly:

"Charlie, many men have arrived to do trade."

Mr. Thompson stared out of the window. He commanded, without turning his head:

"Fix up a tea for them in Rynteu's yarang. Give them some biscuits, but not too many, just enough to bait them. The quarry does not need much meat to get it caught in the trap."

Mr. Thompson dressed and went out.

In passing the anteroom in which his family lived he noticed a pair of men's torbazes protruding from under the skin curtain. Mr. Thompson went up closer, gave the torbazes a kick and demanded sternly:

"Whose legs are these?"

The curtain stirred and the smiling face of Yarak looked out.

Mr. Thompson flew into a rage.

"You goddam son of a bitch! Did I not warn you to keep away from my house?"

Mr. Thompson's eyes fairly popped out of his head. His red nose went blue and he foamed at the mouth.

Yarak, who was in a recumbent attitude, looked up and asked in surprise:

"But why, Charlie?"

Throwing restraint to the winds Mr. Thompson seized Yarak by the leg and dragged him across the floor to the outer door. Gnashing his metal teeth he roared:

"Get out!"

Yarak rose slowly to his feet, smiled wryly and walked away, smarting under a deep sense of wrong.

Mary's head looked out from under the fur curtain. Her eyes blazed like those of an enraged wolverine. On meeting her father's gaze she jerked the curtain down with a violent gesture.

Mr. Thompson, breathing heavily, went back into his room, and sank limply into his rocking chair weak

with emotion. He filled his pipe and began puffing at it nervously.

"That was carrying it a bit too far. It isn't advisable to fall foul of people, particularly at this time!"

Chiding himself for a hasty temper Mr. Thompson decided to make amends somehow.

He called Mary, but no one answered.

"Ben!" shouted Charlie.

A little boy came running into the room. He was dressed in rich fur garments and his parka was trimmed with white fox. Dark-haired, with regular features, the boy stopped in the doorway and waited for his father to speak.

"Come here, my boy!" Charlie said kindly.

Ben went up to his father and stood beside the rocking chair. Mr. Thompson put his arm around him and asked:

"Has Mary gone out?"

"No, she is sitting in the polog."

"Then why did she not come? I called her."

"She doesn't want to."

There was a pause. Mr. Thompson was lost in thought. Never before had anyone disobeyed his commands. He heaved a sigh. Perhaps she was right?

"Ben," he said, "pass me that album."

Mr. Thompson turned over the photographs and came to one of himself taken in Norway when he was a child. He sat gazing at it.

"Look, Ben. That's you, isn't it?"

The boy looked at the photograph, glanced at himself in the mirror and smiled.

"Ben, would you like to go to America? Go away from here altogether?"

"No!" Ben said in a tone of finality and shook his head.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The hunters and trappers stood in a throng around Charlie's store waiting impatiently for the trading to begin. They had been waiting a long time and Charlie was very late. Maybe Charlie was not well?

Yarak not wishing to dampen the spirits of the traders said nothing about the change that had taken place in his life. He had strictly forbidden Rynteu to mention a word about Charlie having driven him out. He was ashamed that men should hear of his humiliation. He would try first to get to the bottom of the white man's laws himself.

To conceal the wrong that Charlie had done him from men's eyes Yarak forced himself to be cheerful. He mingled with the crowd of hunters and trappers and took part in their conversation.

Vaamcho related the story of his encounter with a white bear the skin of which he had barely managed to bring down. Men exchanged items of news and swapped dogs.

Nearby a group of young men started a wrestling bout on the snow. Their heated bodies, stripped to the waist, steamed in the cold air.

A powerful athlete stepped out of the crowd, threw off his parka and rubbing his hands with a challenging air strutted up and down before the men. He walked twice round the crowd but no one seemed desirous of trying a tussle with him.

The lad cried mockingly:

"Well? Are there no more strong men left here? Look you, not a single man with guts in all this crowd! What will the girls think?"

"I think I am just in the right mood to teach that braggart a lesson!" Yarak said to himself.

He tore off his parka, stepped into the circle and cried with a smile:

"Here's one willing!"

"Throw off the white man's cloth shirt. It will be in your way."

Yarak took off his shirt and advanced slowly towards his opponent.

"Oho, even the girls have flocked up!" said somebody in the crowd. "Oh, those girls! They are always a cause of joy or great shame. I think this bout is worth watching."

The crowd formed a ring round the wrestlers. Small boys in fur garments wriggled their way through to the front.

The contestants stepped round and round for a long while locked in each other's embrace, but without exerting their strength. They seemed to be taking stock of each other's supple bodies. Suddenly Yarak raised his arm and fetched his opponent a powerful blow on the neck with the palm of his hand. There was a resounding noise as of an oar smacking the water. At the same instant the other seized Yarak's leg below the knee and both bodies came down in a crash. They sprang to their feet in the twinkling of an eye and stood facing each other again.

At the height of the struggle Charlie's voice was suddenly heard:

"Hullo!"

Diverted by the shout the two wrestlers tripped over onto the snow amid the hearty laughter of the spectators.

"A box of tobacco to the strongest!" shouted Charlie, who had not recognized Yarak.

The wrestlers came to grips fiercely. Their eyes were bloodshot. Suddenly Yarak swung his opponent off his feet, threw him to the ground and laid him on his back amid the wild cheers of the crowd.

Yarak sat triumphantly astride his defeated opponent.

It was only then that Mr. Thompson noticed who the victor was.

"All right! The tobacco is not wasted! At least my man got it!" he thought, trying to smother his vexation.

They all trooped off to the store. Mr. Thompson took down a two-pound box of fragrant plug tobacco and solemnly presented it to the victor.

Yarak accepted the gift and looked at Charlie a trifle disconcerted. It was difficult to understand the white man. Only a short time ago Charlie had dragged him out by the leg like a dead dog and now he had given him a whole box of tobacco.

"We shall trade later on," cried Mr. Thompson cheerfully. "First let us drink tea."

Charlie's gay mood communicated itself to all the hunters. Everybody could see that Charlie was in an unusually good humour today.

The hunters had already drunk tea in Rynteu's yarang, but who would say nay to a cup of tea in Charlie's own house? No one! Not even if a man were filled with water up to the very neck.

"Mary, treat the guests to tea, and plenty of it!" cried Mr. Thompson.

This convivial mood of Mr. Thompson's pleased Mary and her mother greatly. They lost no time in bringing in the tea things and a huge kettle with a strong brew of tea.

The hunters sat in a semi-circle, munching soda crackers and sipping hot tea and speaking of their host in high terms.

"Charlie's a good fellow!"

"Yes, a very good fellow!"

One box of biscuits was dispatched in less than no time and Charlie ordered another box to be brought in.

"Let's have more kav-kav! Plenty of kav-kav!" shouted Charlie.

Rultyna and Mary served the guests with pleasure. Indeed, who would not be delighted to treat people in one's house properly, treat them until they were drenched with tea and their bellies waxed big!

Rultyna was now definitely convinced that her white husband had been trafficking with the evil spirits during the night. It was they who had turned his mind topsy-turvy. In his right mind he would have scolded her for every extra lump of sugar and every biscuit. O, she knew that only too well.

"Your belly is only fit for stuffing with rubbish and not for wasting good biscuits on," Charlie always used to tell her. She could not for the life of her understand what had come over him now.

After a copious tea the bartering began. Vaamcho was first to open business. He said to Mr. Thompson:

"Charlie, I have a polar bear lying in my sledge. A very big skin. Shall I bring it in?"

"No, don't. We shall look at it outside. It is crowded in here and not light enough."

The hunters swarmed into the street. Men lent Vaamcho an eager hand in laying out the enormous skin. It was the unanimous opinion that the skin was a splendid one.

Mr. Thompson wiped his glasses, dropped heavily to his knees, and crawled over the thick hair of the bear-skin on all fours. He tugged the hair in many places but it held firm. There was not a single flaw in the skin. The pile was even and snow-white. Mr. Thompson measured the skin which was fourteen feet from tail to ears. He ordered it to be rolled up and went towards his store.

At that moment a dog-team swept into view on the hillside. It was coming down at great speed, and men immediately recognized it as Alitet's. Mr. Thompson stopped. Alitet interested him more than Vaamcho's bearskin, good as it was.

Alitet's team dashed up to Charlie's house with a loud barking. The dogs charged headlong into another team which some hunter from a distant settlement had left lying near the house. Instantly there arose a yelping mêlée of fighting dogs, flashing fangs and flying tufts. In the space of a second Alitet's hounds had torn one of the dogs to pieces.

Some eight men seized Alitet's dogs by their harness and it was all they could do to drag off the maddened beasts.

The owner of the dog-team went up to Alitet and said:

"Why did you loose your dogs on my team, Alitet?"

"Why did you place them in my way? Now you'll know next time!" Alitet said insolently.

"Yes, I dare say I shall," acquiesced the hunter.

Catching sight of Mr. Thompson in the crowd Alitet turned his back on the hunter and strode over to him with a dignified air, the gee pole in his hand. He took off his deerskin mitten and shook hands with Charlie.

"Come into the house, Alitet," said Mr. Thompson. "I have something important to discuss with you."

Alitet shouted in the direction of his sledge:

"Tygrena!"

"Never mind the woman just now," said Charlie. "Don't you know that a woman should be kept out of sight when men discuss business?"

"But Charlie, this is my second wife—the one you were interested in. That is why I took her with me."

"Not now, not now!" Mr. Thompson said crossly with a gesture of protest.

"Charlie, I do not want her to meet Aye," said Alitet in an undertone. "He is her former plighted husband. I hear that he has come down, too, from the mountains.

You know yourself what little sence women have. She will go off like an untethered dog—then go and look for her.”

“You need not worry. Aye has not finished his bargain with me yet.”

Tygrena came up to the men and stood staring in silence at Charlie whom she knew by hearsay.

Charlie broke into English:

“Not a bad looking gal that! Okay, lady!” and he patted Tygrena on the back.

Charlie’s unintelligible muttering reminded Tygrena of the grunting of a walrus. She tittered into the sleeve of her handsome parka.

“Our women like white men,” said Alitet ingratiatingly.

Mr. Thompson put his arm round Tygrena and drew her to him with a loud laugh.

“You take a stroll in the meantime, Tygrena!” he said, and taking Alitet by his girdle he led him into the house.

Mr. Thompson, on entering the room, hastily closed the door and threw off his jacket.

“Alitet, there is important business! Sit down on that chair. Do you want to drink some firewater?”

“Very much. I have not seen it for a long time. I have almost forgotten how it smells.”

There was a pleasant gurgling sound of whisky being poured into cups. They tossed it off. Alitet stroked his belly and said:

“That was good! Pour out some more!”

“No sir!” said Mr. Thompson. “When night comes we shall drink some more, but now we have to discuss important things. Don’t you know that a man must keep his brains clear when he has business on his mind? I have great news.”

Alitet wiped the inside of the cup and licked the drops of firewater off his fingers.

The room was hot and stuffy. Alitet undid his belt and took off his parka. Mr. Thompson regarded his sweaty body with disgust. He brought out a checked shirt and said:

"Put that on, Alitet! It isn't good to sit without a shirt on."

The idea struck Alitet as funny, but he slipped the shirt on and wriggled uncomfortably. The cloth garment restricted his movements and tickled his skin. How could one compare it to the shirt made of the soft and silky skin of the young reindeer! Still, one had to put up with it. Charlie was the master here. He had his own law.

Mr. Thompson, who had been gazing searchingly at Alitet's face, suddenly demanded:

"Alitet, who has made a big trader out of you?"

Alitet digested this for a little while, then said briefly and somewhat irresolutely:

"You."

"Come, don't be afraid. I am not going to cheat you. I want you to become a rich man. I am your old friend, am I not?"

Alitet, visibly relieved, answered with better grace:

"Yes, Charlie! You say the truth. And you and I are not ordinary friends. We are marriage friends. That is why I have brought Tygrena."

"But most important of all, Alitet, is that we are trading friends, friends in the fur-buying business. Those two hundred and twenty white foxes which you have lying in your sledge I shall not buy from you. Take them back home."

Alitet started up. His ferret eyes in their narrow slits sharpened.

"No, no, don't be scared," said Mr. Thompson smiling. "I want you to trade with the white captain yourself when the schooner arrives this summer. You will receive very many goods from such trading."

"What was Charlie saying?" Alitet wondered. "What strange things was he saying!" Alitet was bewildered. He stammered, almost in a whisper:

"Charlie, none of the fox skins lying in my sledge have been paid for. I have called on many hunters and trappers in the tundra, but not one of them received a plug of tobacco, or a knife or a thimble from me. They are waiting to be paid. I have to buy goods from you for these skins."

"I know. You will take the fox skins back and I will give you all the goods you need on credit. You will carry the goods round to the hunters and let them have them on credit. It will be all right. They will pay back in furs next year."

"They will sure pay back. I myself will take everything they have."

"That's right. We must buy up at once, in advance, all the furs they will have next year. Do you understand, Alitet?"

"Alitet understands. All the pelts will come to me."

"But you must listen carefully and do as I tell you. You can see yourself that I am doing my best for you. I shall teach you how to trade with the American schooner and barter with the hunters and trappers of the tundra and the coast. O, this is something I never told you before! In the summer, when the schooner comes to me, I shall tell the captain that you have a lot of fur, and he is sure to make a call on you. We shall do business together, like trading brothers."

Alitet sat listening with a fascinated stare, like a dog expecting a bit of meat.

"How good that I brought Tygrena!" thought Alitet. "He has never been so kind. He is very generous."

"Well, Alitet, do you understand what has to be done?"

"Alitet understands everything. You don't know Alitet!" he answered importantly.

"Okay then! Now we can drink as much firewater as we want and have a good time with the women."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Tygrena went back to the sledge. Gazing with curiosity at the house and store of Charlie Red Nose she thought: "Why has Alitet brought me here?"

The memory of the fat white man with the bits of glass over his eyes brought a smile to her face. "What funny grunting noises he made when he spoke!"

Old Rynteu came up to the sledge.

"Woman," he said, addressing Tygrena, "why do you sit here and not go into my yarang? In Rynteu's yarang there is always tea for the guests and food for the dogs. Charlie even allows a little sugar for visitors."

Tygrena took a fancy to the old man. His face was kind and his words gentle.

Just then Tygrena caught sight of Vaamcho who was busy with his bearskin. Her face lit up and she said to Rynteu:

"You drive the sledge down. I will come later." And she ran up to Vaamcho.

"What are you doing with Bruin, Vaamcho?"

"I wanted to sell it, but you and Alitet interrupted. I did not finish the deal. Now I shall have to take it back. Alitet has spoilt Charlie's mood."

"Vaamcho, he drove the dogs furiously all the way. Like a man who hurries to get ashore from the ice fields. And as soon as he saw the Merican he dropped everything. He dropped the dogs. He never did that before. He never trusted them to anyone."

"Did you see Charlie, Tygrena? Men say he is Alitet's friend by wife."

Tygrena thought of the fat clumsy Tang and was silent.

"They are bad men, Tygrena! Wolves, both of them. Katam merkichkin!" he swore.

Tygrena smiled and said archly:

"O, Vaamcho, you are becoming brave!"

Vaamcho reddened and changed the subject.

"There is some more news. Aye is here. He has come to sell fox skins for his master Yatkhyrgyn."

Tygrena was all ears.

"He asked about you. He has become a herdsman in Yatkhyrgyn's reindeer herds. He has given up the coast. He says it is lonely on the coast, he feels too ashamed to live there. He gave his rifle away to Yatkhyrgyn.

"Perhaps Aye wants to work for a wife. Yatkhyrgyn has many girls," said Tygrena.

"I don't know," answered Vaamcho.

"Where is Aye?"

"Aye is in Rynteu's yarang. He is telling the news. He hasn't come out all day. Tygrena, do you not wish to go to Rynteu's yarang? His yarang is the source of all the news. A man filled with news is a welcome guest everywhere."

"I do not know where to go, Vaamcho. I have lost my way entirely."

Rynteu's yarang presented a scene of great animation. Aye was lying on a couch of skins with his hands clasped behind his head and speaking to an interested audience:

"...When I came to Yatkhyrgyn he asked me: 'Have you left the coast for good? Why did you leave? Is it bad there?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'it's bad. Miserable. Alitet took

my bride from me. My hands are no longer willing to work.'

" 'Aha!' said Yatkhyrgyn. 'I do not need hands. I need legs for my herds. If you run well and take good care of my herds you will get a juicy piece to eat. We'll find a girl for you as well.'

"Just then the women brought in rich boiled meat.

" 'Try some,' said Yatkhyrgyn.

"I began to eat.

" 'Oho!' he said. 'You are a ravenous eater, I see. I trust you will prove as good a herder. If not I'll throw you out!'

"So I went to the herd. You just try to keep good watch on the reindeer! Try to keep them grazing all the time and not allow them to lie down. Try to keep them nibbling at the moss so that they grow fat. Oh, how hard it is! When there's a snowstorm raging you do not sleep for guarding against the wolves. You run about like a wolf yourself. In fine weather you are busy setting traps to catch foxes.

"Then Yatkhyrgyn himself visited the herd, arriving on a sledge team of beautiful white reindeer.

" 'Aye,' he said, 'I see you are as good a herdsman as you are ravenous an eater. You have kept the herd safe and trapped foxes as well. Here, pass them over. Tut-tut, my eyes have never seen their likes. They must be taken direct to Charlie Red Nose,' he said, 'and bartered for goods, for Alitet will count them as ordinary pelts—he will say: one tail, two tails, three tails. . . . Take a nap until sunrise under the belly of a reindeer and then go down to the trading yarang. Put on my snowshoes. They are strong and the trail is long. You will come back and tend my herds again. In three years I shall give you a good girl.'

"But I don't need any girl of his," went on Aye. "My heart longed for the coast. My eyes craved for the sight

of the coast dwellers. I wanted to hear their speech. It is cheerful on the coast. People everywhere, but there only reindeer. And so I went. After I had walked two days I saw a campfire burning in Hare's Trail valley. There beside it I saw a tent and a dog-team. I ran up, and whom should I see but a Russian. He had come from far away and was three months on the trail. He was travelling to the Chukotsk headland. Called himself a chief. But whoever saw a chief without a beard! He asked me:

“ ‘Is it far to the Chukotsk headland?’

“ ‘No,’ I said, ‘it’s near. One day’s dog trail.’

“ ‘Oh, only one day? In that case my dogs can rest a little longer. Sit down,’ he says. ‘Would you like some tea?’

“He had everything – sugar, and biscuits, and meat in iron tins and tobacco. Maybe he was a chief after all? We sat up all night, talking. He asked me questions about everything. My throat got dry from talking. But he kept on asking me questions. Then he began talking himself. He spoke such things that my head got dazed and muddled. He said that out there on the Mainland of the Russians there had been a war. Remember, we heard rumours about it? The rich men were fighting the poor. All the rich men have been driven out and common folk like you and me have become chiefs and make their own law. He spoke about Charlie and Alitet too. He said the Merican will be driven off the coast. Alitet too.

“ ‘We shall give you the job of trading,’ he said.”

Aye laughed.

“He’s no chief—he’s too young! He says there will soon be a new law on the Chukotsk headland, too, and that law will pass down the whole coast and all through the tundra. I don’t suppose he knew what he was talking about. . . .”

Silence reigned in the yarang. Men had never heard such skilfully spun tales in this yarang before. Where had Aye learned the art of such masterly storytelling? Was it not spirits he encountered in Hare's Trail valley? Who knows whom a man might meet on the lonely trail?

"What happened to the Russian?" someone enquired.

"He gave me a lift and then rode off to the Chukotsk headland. I said to him, 'You will not be able to get through this way. The mountains bar the path. There is a gorge there, but you will not be able to find it.' 'Oh, I'll get through,' he says. A brave man! He had a paper in his pocket with all the rivers and the coast line drawn on it. 'Well, just as you like,' I said. He shook me a long time by the hand and said:

" 'Good-bye, Aye! We shall meet again soon. You and I will be making a new law here. We shall change life....' A queer man! Change life! It is not easy to change the yarang, leave alone life. I can't make the man out."

"It wasn't a man, it was a spirit," said an old hunter in a tone of conviction.

Yarak drew up to Aye and asked:

"Did he bring the law of the white men?"

"I don't know," answered Aye evasively.

"You cannot believe the Tangs. I saw many of them on the American whalers," said Yarak. "They are great liars and cheats. You can never understand them. Their law is like the wind—it blows all ways. And what was his name, this Russian's?"

"Andrei," answered Aye. "He has kind eyes, they look as though they were telling the truth."

Vaamcho crawled into the polog followed by Tygrena. The latter slipped the handsome parka from her shoulders and squatted by the entrance.

"Kakomei, Tygrena!" cried Aye delightedly, rising

on one knee. "Have you become a trader? Have you begun visiting trading yarangs?"

Tygrena looked at Aye in silence.

"Go on with your story, Aye!" came cries from all sides.

"You tell very interesting stories."

"You have learned good fairy tales in the tundra."

"Tell us some more about the beardless one."

Vaamcho leaned over to his neighbour and asked in a low voice:

"What was Aye talking about?"

"Interesting news. Very interesting. I never heard such news before."

"Go on, Aye! Why have you stopped?" urged Vaamcho.

But the sight of Tygrena seemed to have deprived Aye of the power of speech. He wanted to ask Tygrena how she lived, what she thought, but he was ashamed to do so in front of all these people. They all knew that Alitet had taken Tygrena away from him. They might begin to make fun of him. It were better if Tygrena had not come with all these men here. Aye lit up his pipe in silence. It was not good to be a man who is pitied. Nevertheless he moved up to where Tygrena was sitting.

A woman's head was thrust into the polog.

"Tygrena," she said, "Alitet has asked for you."

Tygrena herself was glad of the excuse to get away from all these curious eyes. She drew up her fur parka and crept out silently.

"Why have you let your wife go, Aye?" said a young hunter with a sneer.

Yarak threw him an angry look. It seemed to him that the taunt was meant for him.

"It's good to see a man's wife led away under his nose," continued the wit.

Yarak clenched his teeth and struck the scoffer a blow in the face.

The man slunk into a corner clutching his nose. Silence fell on the yarang. Aye threw his parka over his shoulders and crawled out.

No one understood and sympathized with Aye as much as Yarak. Both had striven in vain to possess a family of their own. And what hunter is considered a real man if he has no wife? A man without a wife was fair game for the jester.

Yarak hastened out after Aye, who walked towards the seashore. He caught up with him and they walked on together in silence as far as the pack ice.

The sun dipped behind the mountain. It was a still evening. Mr. Thompson's house stood out clearly in the near distance. A light went up in the little window and quickly disappeared behind the lowered blind.

"Merkichkin!" Yarak swore softly. "Charlie always does that when he has a woman in his room."

Aye stood kicking the pack ice. Now and then he stole a look at the white man's house.

"Yours is a poor life, Aye," said Yarak sympathetically. "So is mine. I wanted to marry Mary, but Charlie drove me out. He shouted at me. Then he pulled me out by the leg. I was terribly ashamed. Like I was a weak, helpless man. Every white man has his own law."

"Charlie pulled you by the leg, and Alitet pulls me all the time by the heart. Pulls it out as you would the heart from a reindeer carcass. Ai, it hurts! I wanted to shoot myself.... But now ... that Russian has told me so many things.... I keep on thinking and thinking all the time. I am afraid I will go mad with all this thinking. I can't understand half the things he was talking about. Much too much talking for one night. Do you know what he told me, Yarak? He told me that

Alitet would not be such a rich man now. The new law will put him quite low."

"He is a liar, Aye. All the white men are alike. Their tongues wag about in their mouths like a rag in the wind. I saw many of them on the American whaleboats."

"But that Russian's eyes looked kind. They were good, truthful eyes. He will drive the Merican off the coast too."

Yarak smiled wryly and said:

"Who can drive Charlie away? He has a lot of goods, he is a strong man. He will drink firewater with the Russians and laugh. They have one and the same law. I know, I have seen when the Russian merchant, Pete Brukhanov, visited Charlie."

"No, Yarak! This man is different. He is young, but he speaks like an old man. Quietly. He says he has brought many new laws with him. And a law for marriage too. So he said."

Vaamcho appeared from behind an ice pack.

"Why have the hunters come out to the ice without a rifle?" he said with a smile.

The lads laughed.

"It is a bad day today," Vaamcho continued. "I have brought a good skin of the white bear but did not succeed in trading it. Charlie Red Nose went away. He dropped everything and went off with Alitet for the whole day. Trading is bad when Alitet is here. He brought Tygrena for Charlie. They called her to him."

"Ah, Vaamcho, speak no more! A great anger is entering my heart!" cried Aye.

"There is anger in every man's heart. Only your anger, Aye, is hidden away deep."

"Ah!" groaned Aye and he bit his hand until it bled.

"I know now what Charlie will do," went on Yarak. "He will pour firewater down Tygrena's throat."

She will burn her throat and become weak and dizzy and helpless as a child. He always does that with women.

A feeling of humiliation and harsh resentment swept over Aye. He made a sudden dash towards Charlie's house. The door of the room was locked.

"From whom have you shut yourself in—from the white bear?" shouted Aye, shaking the door.

He heard the tipsy voice of Tygrena. She was singing.

In a fit of fury Aye wrenched the door open and rushed into Charlie's room.

"You goddam son of a bitch!" roared Mr. Thompson. "What do you mean by breaking into my house? Did I call you? Get out! Get out before I break your neck!"

Aye hurled himself on Charlie and seized him by the throat. The attack was so sudden and violent that Charlie lost his balance and fell onto the rocking chair. Aye tightened his grip on his throat. Beneath the weight of the two struggling men the chair toppled over backwards and sent them sprawling on the floor. The huge horn of the overturned gramophone dropped with a crash. Charlie grew purple in the face.

At that moment Alitet staggered drunkenly into the room. He threw himself on Aye and dragged him off. Aye wrenched himself free, leapt on the table and kicked the lamp onto the floor. Amid the ensuing darkness and confusion he slipped out of the house.

Alitet, hopping about trying to get into his deerskin trousers, screamed:

"Where's my rifle? Quick! I'll shoot that pup on the spot!"

But Aye was already on the hillside, making for the settlement.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The sun beat down. The air was clear and translucent. The dazzling whiteness of the snow and the blazing sunshine made the eyes smart. Floundering in the soft snow, the dog-team struggled on with lolling tongues. Alongside the sledge, sinking at every step into the snow, walked Andrei Zhukov. All around lay rolling expanses of snow-clad hills and valleys. There was not a sign of life anywhere. . . .

Andrei Zhukov, a student of the geographical faculty of the Petrograd University, had arrived in Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka in the autumn of 1922. Here he had readily accepted the proposal of the Gubernia Revcom^{*} to go down to the Arctic coast by sledge trail. And so he had set out in the height of the winter on a tour of inspection of the ancient Russian lands of Chukotsk.

An old professor at the university, a member of the Russian Narodnaya Volya** party who had spent some years in exile in this region, had imparted to Andrei Zhukov his entire Chukchi vocabulary. This had stood him in good stead. During his three months' journey by dog sledge Andrei had met not a few of the local inhabitants of whom he had only read about in books and ethnological studies.

Now spring had set in and his long trail was drawing to a close. Kamchatka and the Koryak country lay far behind him and he had already set foot on the Chukotsk tundra.

Andrei stopped the team. "Where can that gorge be of which the reindeer herdsman was telling me?"

* Provincial Revolutionary Committee.—*Trans.*

** "Narodnaya Volya" (People's Will) Party, which carried on its political struggle by means of individual terrorism against prominent representatives of the autocratic government.—*Trans.*

thought Andrei as he scanned the endless chain of mountain ridges.

There were no tracks in the snow. Not a speck or a blade of grass. A reindeer or even a hare would be a welcome sight. He was running short of food for the dogs too. The strain was beginning to tell on the underfed animals.

"No, I'll have to give up the idea of making the short cut. Let the geese take it if they want!"

Andrei sat down in the sledge and steered for the coast. The dogs, as though guessing their master's design, pushed on at a livelier pace. The hilly landscape lay wrapped in an unearthly stillness.

Suddenly Andrei felt a sharp twinge of pain in his eyes. He covered them with his hand, so sharp the pain was. After a lengthy time he drew his hand away and suddenly discovered that he could see nothing. It was as though a dark film had been drawn over his eyes.

Andrei stopped the dogs. He rubbed his eyes and realized with a shock that he had gone blind. He lay down on the sledge listening to the stillness that seemed to engulf him from all sides and fighting back a sense of panic.

Finally, he decided to trust himself to the instinct of the dogs. Sitting up in the sledge he cried to the lead dog:

"Forward, Verny!"

And the dogs took off. After running on for a long time at an even pace the dogs suddenly broke into a canter.

"What is this?" thought Andrei and brought the sledge to a stop with his gee pole, deciding that the dogs had picked up some trail.

He groped about in the snow and found a track made by a sledge that had passed that way. Andrei drew a breath of relief. That meant there was human habitation not far away.

The dogs went off again at a spanking rate. But the wind no longer blew in Andrei's face.

"The wind has veered," thought Andrei.

He took his hat off the better to determine the direction of the wind, when suddenly he heard someone shout his name:

"Andrei!"

"Am I bewitched, or what?" thought Andrei. "Who on earth could call me by name in this wilderness of snow?"

He stopped the team and listened tensely, turning his head from side to side.

The call being repeated Andrei shouted at the top of his voice:

"Aho-oy!"

A man ran noiselessly up to the sledge and said, gasping for breath:

"Andrei, is it you?"

Andrei started. He spun round at the sound of the voice and asked sharply:

"Who is that?"

"It is I, Aye. Have you forgotten me, Andrei?"

"Aye!" exclaimed Andrei with a shout of joy and rushed towards the voice.

Hugging Aye in his embrace as though he feared the apparition might disappear, Andrei said:

"My eyes have gone bad. I cannot see."

"That often happens when there is a big sun. You must put a reindeer skin or something on your eyes. Something dark. It will soon pass. Tomorrow you will be all right."

"Aye, cut a piece off my black bag."

Aye turned the bag about in his hands and said with a sigh:

"It is a pity to cut such a good bag."

"Never mind that, Aye! Come on, cut a piece off!"

Aye cut off a strip and tied it over Andrei's eyes.

"Well, my friend," said Andrei, "I think we can spend the night here—what do you say? You are not in a hurry to get anywhere?"

"No," answered Aye.

"Then put up the tent. We shall have some tea. And something to eat. Aye, what is this trail along which I have been riding?"

"It is your own trail," replied Aye. "I have already looked at it. You were going round and round. You would still be going round. Dogs will never swerve unless a man makes them."

They were soon comfortably ensconced in the tent.

"Andrei, the snow in the kettle has become water. The bandage on your eyes must be made wet. It is better so."

"All right. Aye, go ahead! You know what's the right thing to do."

Aye moistened and wrung out the bandage and tied it over Andrei's eyes again.

"Andrei, are you really a chief?"

Zhukov smiled.

"Yes, I am. But I am not the big chief. The big chief will come in the summer when the steamer arrives. He sent me on ahead."

"A-ah!" said Aye. Then, after a pause: "Ai, it's bad for me, Andrei! I am in trouble. They will no doubt shoot me down like a hare."

"Who is going to shoot you?"

The hills were wrapped in silence. A light night frost penetrated the tent. It was time to go to sleep, but Aye's heart was full and he unburdened it to Andrei, telling him of what happened at Charlie Red Nose's trading yarang, of the reason why Alitet wanted to shoot him, of Tygrena and of many other things.

The dogs dozed peacefully outside. The sun went down and reappeared in a welter of crimson.

"Do not worry, Aye! You have nothing to fear. Nobody will dare touch you. I promise you that. You will soon see it for yourself. And now let us take a little sleep and drive down to the coast together."

Aye did not go to sleep. He was a herdsman, and herdsmen were used to going without sleep for two or three nights running. Aye walked around the tent, then examined the sledge in a businesslike manner and tightened the thongs that had come loose. Then he sat down and stared long at the wooden seat of the sledge. Aye was thinking. At length he drew out his knife and cut off a slat from the board of the seat. He swiftly cut out two discs, drilled little holes in them with the point of his blade, tied them together with a slender thong and put them on his nose.

The result of his handiwork elicited a grunt of satisfaction.

Hearing Andrei's voice calling him Aye ran to the tent.

"Aye, I can see you now. That's good!"

"And I have made you a pair of lookers. Our people in the hills who have weak eyes always wear them," said Aye, placing the spectacles on his nose.

Andrei burst out laughing.

"But, my dear fellow, you can't see through wood!"

"There are little holes in them. Quite enough to see. You must not go about without lookers. The sun is shining strongly again."

Andrei put on the wooden spectacles and went outside.

"Why, they are wonderful! Wooden optics—fancy that! That was very clever of you, Aye! Splendid! Get the dogs up and let us be going."

"It will be bad for me to show myself on the coast, ah, very bad!" said Aye in tones of distress.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Aye took his seat in the sledge beside Andrei. He pointed out the way in harassed silence, brooding over his coming meeting with people on the coast.

At last he caught sight of the Loren settlement in the distance.

"Andrei, will you go to the trading yarang? To the white man? To Charlie? Perhaps I had better stay here?"

"Why should I be going to him? You and I will go to one of the hunter's yarangs."

"Are you afraid of Charlie?"

Andrei broke into a peal of laughter. The sound allayed Aye's fears and inspired him with sudden confidence in the powers of the young Russian chief.

Aye, with a new sense of elation, took over the reins from Andrei and drove the team down to Rynteu's yarang. A crowd quickly gathered round the sledge.

"Look! Aye has brought a white man with him!"

"That is him, the Russian chief," Aye whispered to his friend Vaamcho.

He then went back to Andrei who was sitting waiting in the sledge and said in the same low voice:

"Andrei, this is Vaamcho, of whom I have been telling you. It was his bait Alitet poured the lamp fat over by the Three Hills."

"Ah, Vaamcho! My greetings!" said Andrei warmly. and wrung the lad's hand as though he were an old friend.

Vaamcho was thrown into such confusion that he was at a loss for words. This was the first time in his life that a white man had shaken his hand.

"Go into the dwelling—I will unharness your dogs," he said at last when he had found his tongue.

Rynteu's yarang was still filled with hunters and trap-

pers who were waiting for an opportunity to finish their bartering with Charlie Red Nose. The sudden appearance of the Russian chief of whom Aye had been telling them the previous day was like a waking dream. They eyed the newcomer with curiosity.

The Russian was a tall, sturdy-looking man, but terribly young and with nothing in his appearance that betokened a chief.

Aye pulled out a new reindeer skin and spread it out obligingly for Andrei to sit on. Andrei lay down on the skin, propped up by his elbow, and began filling his pipe.

"Let someone call Charlie here," he said

The hunters exchanged amazed glances.

He must be mad, this Russian! Charlie had never climbed this hill on which the yarangs stood. Whoever heard of such a thing? Charlie would never comply and no one could make him!

"Tell him that the Russian chief wants to see him. He is to come at once," added Andrei sternly

Oho, he must really be a chief if he speaks like that! But who will dare go to Charlie with such a message? Maybe Vamcho will go? No, it would be more fitting for Rynteu, the master of the yarang, to carry such astonishing news. Besides, he was the oldest.

So great and staggering was the news that Rynteu, despite his age, ran all the way to Charlie's house without stopping for breath.

Meanwhile the hunters, all agog with excitement and curiosity, waited to see what would happen. And no wonder! So many events in one single second! Soon they would witness the meeting of two white men. The Russian had not even deigned to call on Charlie. O; that was a thing never before heard of! Something was bound to happen! Most astonishing of all was that the Russian had seemed to have made friends with Aye! He probably

did not know that Aye was simply a herdsman and that he had very nearly strangled Charlie.

More keenly than anybody was Yarak interested in impending events. He considered himself an authority on white men.

In anticipation of Charlie's coming Aye for safety's sake moved up closer to Andrei.

Mr. Thompson was no less astounded by the news than Rynteu. The whole settlement was thrown into a turmoil. And though Charles Thompson, his throat swathed in bandages, felt pretty seedy after the previous night's dissipation, he nevertheless set out without a moment's delay.

He toiled up the hill, puffing with exertion, and squeezed himself into the yarang considerably out of breath. His eyes travelled over the assembled company and alighting on the Russian he greeted him politely in Chukchi.

"Sit down, please," Andrei answered him in English.

"Oh, you speak English! May I know whom I have the honour of speaking to?"

"My name is Zhukov. You are Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, Charles Thompson. I'm very glad, Mr. Zhukoff, to meet a civilized gentleman in these parts. I'm surprised you didn't come straight down to my house. This here place I keep for the hunters and trappers who come down to trade. The air is none too wholesome and it's so primitive in here."

"Don't let that surprise you, Mr. Thompson. As a matter of fact I chose to come to this place instead of to your house as a matter of duty."

"That doesn't sound very courteous, Mr. Zhukoff."

"In my opinion, Mr. Thompson, courtesy required that you, as a foreigner, should make the first call on the official representative of new Russia."

Andrei Zhukov was talking to a real live American for the first time. Aye's experiences in Charlie's house

had roused in Zhukov a feeling of aversion towards this unwelcome intruder from an alien land. He spoke to Mr. Thompson with unveiled asperity and deliberately adopted a heightened official tone.

"Are you a Bolshevik?" queried Mr. Thompson in a voice that registered surprise and a tinge of alarm.

"Yes, I am a Bolshevik."

Mr. Thompson's idea of a Bolshevik, gleaned from the American press, was of a ferocious-looking man with a knife in his mouth. This fair-haired young man with blue eyes who looked rather like a Norwegian and spoke such perfect English upset all his notions.

"A real Bolshevik?" he asked incredulously.

"Why, of course. I am the representative of the Kamchatka Provincial Revolutionary Committee, Mr. Thompson, and I have invited you here to discuss official business."

"Why, certainly Mr. Zhukoff, by all means. I am entirely at your disposal."

"I suppose you're aware, Mr. Thompson, that the representatives of the North Co. will be arriving here when the navigation season opens?"

"Oh, yes. I read about it in the papers."

"The North Co. is taking over the trade in this territory, and you will have to wind up business, Mr. Thompson."

"And what about Stevenson and Clark and Olson?" Mr. Thompson hastily threw in.

"The same applies to them."

"And Mr. Brukhanov and Mr. Karavayev, too?"

"Yes, all of you. The North Co. is organizing six large fur trading posts on the coast. The Soviet Government has granted this company the sole rights of conducting trade in this territory. You will have to wind up your affairs here, Mr. Thompson, and quit the coast."

Yarak craned his neck like a goose, anxious not to

miss a single word. Yarak could hardly believe his ears. Everybody had thought Charlie Red Nose to be stuck to the coast like lichen to a rock, which no wind could shake loose. What he now heard left Yarak dumbfounded.

Clearly this beardless Russian was a chief after all. And what a powerful chief he must be to speak thus to Charlie?

"One more thing, Mr. Thompson," continued Andrei. "This has something to do with your private life here."

"Yes, Mr. Zhukoff—what is it?"

"I have heard, Mr. Thompson, that you are guilty of conduct that is most reprehensible in a gentleman of your age and not at all in keeping with civilized ethics."

Mr. Thompson breathed hard.

"I have in mind the rather unpleasant incident in which this man was involved in your house yesterday." Aye started at the touch of Andrei's hand on his shoulder. "This is worse than discourtesy, Mr. Thompson, don't you agree?"

A deep flush suffused Mr. Thompson's face, then left it bloodless. He said nothing.

"And you call yourself a civilized man after that—a representative of the cultured world?" said Andrei scornfully.

Mr. Thompson hung his head. This was perhaps the first time in twenty years that he had had his conduct brought home to him. The fact that this conversation was being carried on in the presence of the hunters, especially that of Yarak who knew sufficient English to be able to follow it, was all the more painful. Without raising his head he said quietly in Chukchi:

"Yarak, go out!"

Yarak unwillingly rose to his feet.

"No, you stay here, Yarak," said Andrei. "I need you."

Mr. Thompson sat motionless and silent. No one had ever seen him look so humbled as he did at that moment.

"That's all, Mr. Thompson. I think I have made myself clear?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, that's all I have to say. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," growled Mr. Thompson as he waddled ponderously towards the exit.

"The scoundrel!" muttered Andrei in Chukchi when he had gone.

The sun, having climbed to the top of the sky, was now on its downward path. Outside the hunters were gathered in an excited crowd, discussing this amazing news without end. Ai, ai, ai, what news this was! Something to tell to the people on the coast on their way home! The bearer of such news would certainly be a welcome guest in every yarang along the coast.

Yarak stood in the centre of the crowd, giving an enthusiastic though somewhat garbled account of what had passed between the white men. The sum and substance of the event, however, was clear to everybody.

The sun dipped earthwards, but men still stood around talking and talking. A night frost hardened the moist snow. Alitet had taken a hasty departure, and his sledge had long since disappeared behind the hill. Indeed, there was food for talk!

Andrei was served fresh seal liver. For company he had Aye, Vaamcho and Yarak.

They drew diffidently around Zhukov and fell to eating too.

"Andrei, what is Vaamcho to do with his bearskin now?" asked an emboldened Aye.

"Let him sell it to Charlie. He can go on trading until the summer."

"And what about me? Charlie Red Nose has not yet given me all the goods for the foxes I brought. The pelts are not mine. Yatkhyrgyn will scold me."

"Go to Charlie and get what is due. Or are you still afraid of Charlie, Aye?"

"No. I am no longer afraid of him. And Alitet has gone too. There is nothing to be afraid of!" cried Aye gaily.

Having finished his meal and drunk tea Andrei went outside closely followed by his new friends.

The lads had the dog-team harnessed for him in the twinkling of an eye. Busiest of all was Aye. Yarak still regarded the new white man with a lingering suspicion.

Andrei got out his wooden spectacles and put them on. Upon seeing this Yarak pulled out a pair of real goggles from under his parka and held them in silence to Andrei.

"Oh, splendid! How much do they cost?"

"Nothing," answered Yarak.

Andrei took out five rubles and gave them to Yarak.

"What is that for?" asked Yarak.

"Buy yourself another pair."

"Charlie does not sell anything for paper. He only barter pelts."

"You tell him I said he was to sell you a pair of glasses. That is Russian money and he is obliged to accept it."

The dogs strained at their traces, eager to be off. Andrei took his leave of the hunters.

"Well, my friends, good-bye! We shall soon meet again."

The Kamchadale team took off at a gallop.

"Did you hear what the Big Chief said, eh?" cried Vaamcho gazing after the retreating sledge. "He said 'friends'!"

PART TWO



CHAPTER ONE

CAPTAIN Harry Brown, with an Oregon briar gripped between his teeth, stood by the steering wheel of his schooner the *Polar Bear* as it cruised under easy sail off the coast of Alaska.

He was a heavy, squat-bodied man of about forty. The yellow oilskins which he wore made his face look younger than it was. Harry Brown's powerful, heavy hands were thrust into the pockets of his blue jeans. The latter, by the way, consisted entirely of red-stitched pockets bulging with a variety of contents. There were pockets everywhere—on the breast and on the legs, over the knees and across the captain's broad thighs. One would think that this garment served Harry Brown as a sort of auxiliary storehouse. The brass buttons flaunted an emblem rather unusual for nautical wear in the shape of a railway engine.

Harry Brown was a practical man of the sea, uncertified as master mariner for either high sea navigation or coasting service. But that did not prevent him from being a good seaman. He knew and loved the sea and undertook the dangerous voyages across the Arctic Ocean

on his *Polar Bear* with pleasure and ability. His ship, for all its innocent name, was neither more nor less than a smuggler.

The schooner's entire crew consisted of two men, besides the skipper—a hard-boiled strapping fellow of a steersman by the name of Mr. Harlow, and the easy-going good-tempered rascal Jim, who combined the duties of ship's engineer and cook. They were both prinked up in oilskins and blue jeans similar to those worn by the skipper, a fact which they prided themselves on as an unmistakable sign of the democracy that ruled the deck of their little 120-ton craft.

They all three stood at the wheel peering hard into the heavy pall of mist as their vessel, obedient to the skipper's hand, sneaked like a thief in the night through the strait off the coast of Alaska.

Strange things were happening in the world. Captain Brown many a bright sunny day had sailed past in full sight of the town of Nome where Mr. Kerry, the customs officer, had had his residence for many years. And every year, when navigation opened, they would meet like old friends:

"Hello, Mr. Brown!"

"Hello, Mr. Kerry!"

The urbanities over, Mr. Brown would head his ship for the islands, then coolly steer a straight course for the grim but rich shores of the Chukotsk Peninsula. So it had been.

"But things have changed lately. These fine traditions of the Arctic have been dished, gone up in smoke," as Captain Brown expressed it.

Mr. Kerry, for no apparent reason, unless it were some sort of high politics, suddenly took it into his head to stop smuggling schooners and turn them back. That was his affair, however. It didn't worry Harry Brown. He was so familiar with the strait and the shores of this

free-port smuggler's paradise that he could guide his *Polar Bear* blindfolded to them through the thickest fog under the nose of the customs officer.

The mist lifted just in time. Alaska now lay behind them. The Arctic sun shone forth in a blaze of golden glory and the rarefied floating blue ice shimmered with a soft, serene radiance. The ship nosed its way forward tacking amid the ice floes like a dog-team among the ice packs. The crew were in excellent spirits. They were out in the Arctic at last, amid the wide open spaces where it was so much easier to breathe than in those stuffy States.

The Russians were far away from here, busy with their revolution, and someone had to supply tobacco to the hunters and trappers of the coast where the beautiful white fox pelts were as thick as hops.

The merry crew of the *Polar Bear* felt very much at home in these waters. The pure bracing air and the pursuit of a profitable occupation were conducive of a healthy appetite.

Jim the cook took a lucky pot shot at a walrus that was dozing peacefully on an ice floe, jumped adroitly onto the ice, swiftly ripped open its belly and cut out the huge liver. Next he knocked the tusks out of its head with a mallet as a souvenir and the schooner resumed its way, gathering speed as it entered ice-free water.

Soon the *Polar Bear* cast anchor off a stretch of beach on which stood three Chukchi yarangs. A skin boat immediately stood off from the shore, with all the population of the encampment in it, including old men and little babies. Who would stay ashore when he could watch trading being done on the deck of the American schooner?

The whole boatload quickly clambered on board and stood regarding the Americans and the deck cargo with great curiosity.

Captain Brown's floating store held a great attraction for the hunters. Here a man knew he would always be treated to food and a drink. And after a drink a man's heart grows gay and kind and trading becomes a cheerful business.

Mr. Brown could not be called stingy. He immediately gave orders for tea to be served the guests with the generous addition of two soda crackers for each person. The hunters drank their tea with gusto right there on deck.

Mr. Brown, with the smile of a benefactor, asked:

"Are there many white fox pelts ashore?"

"Very many! And many white bears, too! And red foxes, ermines, squirrels and wolf pelts," answered an old hunter.

"No schooner has come this way yet. Yours is the first this summer," said another.

"Has Charlie Red Nose bought many fox pelts this winter?"

"Very many! Very many!" replied an elderly hunter artlessly as he sipped his tea. "I sold all my white foxes to him. There are only three pelts left for you. Here they are, in this bag."

"There is not much sense in that noddle of yours. Don't you know that Charlie Red Nose is a swindler? Yet you have taken all your pelts to him! Why didn't you leave them for me? Did you do such a bad trade with me last summer? Didn't you get a lot of goods from me. Does Charlie Red Nose trade better than I do? Ugh! Your head does not work at all—it has bird's brains in it," said Captain Brown reproachfully, tapping the man's bared head with a gnarled stubby finger.

The hunter got up grinning shamefacedly and shuffling his feet. He said:

"I had to buy a rifle last winter, and I was short of cartridges. The tobacco was all gone, too, and I had no tea. . . ."

"Are those white foxes in your bag good ones?" broke in Captain Brown. "Maybe they are off-colour---those Charlie Red Nose wouldn't have?"

"No, no, they are good white pelts."

"All right. Come down with me."

Captain Brown descended the little hold in the stern of the ship which had already been opened up. Seating himself on one of the many packing cases lying there he pulled two neatly wrapped tablets of chewing gum out of his breast pocket with a deft movement. He tossed one of them to the hunter, who all but caught it in his mouth, and unwrapped the other one which he promptly popped into his own mouth filled with shining gold teeth. He then casually pulled a flask of whisky from his hip pocket and threw the hunter a shrewd look.

A flush mounted to the hunter's face.

"I thought you were my friend," said the skipper, tossing the flask up into the air and catching it as it came down. "But it seems that Charlie Red Nose is your friend," he wound up, deliberately pocketing it again.

"I have a bearskin in my yarang!" cried the hunter.

"A bearskin? Okay! Now you're talking sense. In that case I'll still consider you my friend."

The captain pulled a collapsible cup out of his knee pocket and poured some whisky into it.

"Here you are!"

He spat the wad of gum over the side with amazing dexterity of aim and took several pulls from the flask.

The hunter, with a thrill of pleasurable anticipation, held the cup in his trembling hands and a slow smile spread over his face. Then he drew the chewing gum out of his mouth with the aid of two fingers and tossed off the whisky in a single gulp.

"A-a-ah, good!" he said in a singsong voice.

Captain Brown refilled the cup without offering

anything in the way of a snack. Indeed, the hunter himself would have declined it, not wishing to spoil the taste of the firewater.

"Oh, you won't easily find another skipper like me," said Brown.

"Very good skipper, fine skipper," babbled the hunter groggily, then he shouted up from the hold:

"Chovka! Bring the bearskin from my yarang, quick!"

The trading was soon over. Captain Brown climbed up on deck and ordered the engine to be got under way.

"I guess we'll have to wait a little, Cap'n," said Harlow with a lewd grin. "Jim's busy in the engine room with a gal."

"Goddam!" growled the captain. "This is no time for love-making! We've got to get a move on!"

The *Polar Bear* laid its course due north. There was not a ripple on the sea as the schooner sped along, coasting the shore. A cloud of birds, startled by a random shot, rose screaming from the cliffs. They circled in the sky like snowflakes in a blizzard. The sea was free of ice. Everything augured a fair and prosperous voyage. Captain Brown stood by the wheel, scanning the sea.

"Well, how's it for a start, skipper?"

"Not bad, Harlow. Not at all bad. That guy's now got exactly eleven dollars fifty-two cents' worth of American goods. The fox pelts have worked out at two dollars fifty apiece. The bearskin's not much to speak of, but I guess it'll fetch a wee bit more'n we paid for it!"

And their hearty laughter awoke the startled echoes on the deserted shore.

Mr. Brown, Mr. Harlow and Jim the cook had emigrated to the States in their youth where they had followed a variety of occupations and travelled the length and breadth of the country. Mexico and California they

knew as well as they knew Alaska and the Chukotsk coast.

Five years ago they had formed a small private company, purchased a schooner and said: "Well, old gal, take us to where the white bear lives!" They had sought the shores of Chukotsk to try their luck in this land of open chances and customs-free trading.

Every winter Captain Brown fitted out his annual expedition for which purpose he scoured the junkstores of Seattle and 'Frisco where he bought up a lot of cheap lumber and gewgaws for next to nothing. On the Chukotsk coast these wares would make the eyes of the native hunters gleam.

"What about putting in at Loren, Harlow? That old coot Thompson will go stark crazy when we tell him this year's news. He prefers to have his news a year old—but dammit if we don't ram it down his throat. Let him swallow the pill whether he likes it or not."

"I say, Skipper, when he hears that the North Co.'s huge steamer *Beachaimo* is coming out from Vancouver he'll sure have a fit."

"Shouldn't be surprised if he swallows his goggles when he hears it!"

The two Americans guffawed.

The galvanized iron roof of Thompson's store glinted dully in the distance.

No sooner did the *Polar Bear* drop anchor than a Chukchi boat shoved off from the beach and rowed swiftly towards the ship amid an excited clamour. Among the hunters in the boat sat Charles Thompson.

"Hello, Captain!" he cried as he clambered up the short ladder.

Mr. Harlow hastened to the side and reaching down a long arm deftly hoisted Mr. Thompson's bulk onto the deck. They went straight to the little cabin where the skipper was waiting to receive them.

Mr. Thompson sank into an easy chair. Captain Brown settled himself on his right, Harlow on the left.

Jim, with a great show of ceremony and scraping, placed cups of steaming coffee and a bowl of fruit on the table.

"Help yourself, Mr. Thompson! You don't have oranges growing in these parts. Imagine yourself for a moment back in civilization—try 'em," invited the captain.

"Thanks, I'd prefer a pipeful of Prince Albert's."

Mr. Harlow promptly proffered him a tin with that elegant gentleman's picture on the outside complete in swallow tails and immaculate little beard.

Mr. Thompson inhaled the fragrant smoke, then suddenly asked:

"What's the news in America, Captain?"

"Hello, since when have you been interested in the latest news?" said the captain with a laugh. "Don't you get it any more from the next year's papers?"

"I might die in the meantime, Captain, and not know what's going on in the world. These are strange times, you know. A man's got to have his news quick these days."

"You've said it, Mr. Thompson. There's plenty of news, let me tell you. A carload of news!"

"More'n a carload, Cap'n!" flung in Mr. Harlow. "A whole darned shipload—the *Beachaimo*!"

"In short, Mr. Thompson, you and I have been caught up in the vortex of big international politics. Countries are making politics and our pockets have got to suffer for it. Yes, Mr. Thompson, suffer for it. I ask you—you're an experienced man of the world, Mr. Thompson,—what do you make of it?"

Captain Brown puffed at his pipe for a while in silence, then pursued:

"Take even this godforsaken hole—you'd think, now who the devil wants it? Eh? What big man of business

would want to mess about with blubber? But there are such men, Mr. Thompson, and big men, too, who are keen to get their greedy paws on this here coast. As for us small fry these sharks'll swallow us whole without the least compunction." Here Captain Brown pulled a wry face fit to unnerve the steadiest heart. "And the worst of it is, Mr. Thompson, that we're tied hand and foot—they won't give us a dog's chance."

"Who won't?" asked Mr. Thompson quietly.

"The Bolsheviks, Mr. Thompson, the Bolsheviks! Revolutions you know. You and I are chatting in Bolshevik waters, if you please. How do you like it, Mr. Thompson? Those Bolsheviks are a pretty smart lot, let me tell you. But that's not where the trouble lies! The trouble is that they have given the North Company the sole rights of trading on Kamchatka and the Chukotsk coast. That's called a concession, my dear Mr. Thompson. And take my word for it, in no less than a month these dismal shores will hear the screech of Vancouver steamers. They'll screech here like jackals in the desert, blast 'em! Do you know, Mr. Thompson, that the North Company's *Beachaimo* is docked right now at 'Frisco taking on cargo?"

Captain Brown paused to let this sink in and stole a glance at Mr. Thompson's face.

"Ten thousand tons, Mr. Thompson! Not the hundred and twenty tons of my poor little *Polar Bear*!"

Mr. Thompson caught his breath. Who on earth would have thought that the North Company would be seriously interested in this territory! A company with a fleet of a hundred and forty ships! That Bolshevik Zhukov must have been telling the truth after all.

The Captain went on:

"You know, Mr. Thompson, the North Company is going to set up trading posts all over the place like those on the Hudson Bay, and stock 'em with genuine first-

class goods. D'you know what that means, Mr. Thompson? It means we'll have to quit. And there's no place to go to except Mars," the skipper added with a gesture of despair. "Judging by the American press this is going to be a trade monopoly with strictly controlled prices both on furs and goods. That was stipulated by the Russian government. I'd like to see those Bolshevik guys trying to control the North Company! There's going to be some fun here if they do, mark my words! D'you think that savage who's been buttering our bread for us till now will bring his trade to you or me unless we're prepared to barter at a loss? No fear! He's got sense or animal instinct enough to know which trail is best for him to follow—you may be sure of that, Mr. Thompson!"

Mr. Thompson removed his glasses and began wiping them without any apparent need. Perspiration had broken out in the lines of his face. Captain Brown at that moment was thinking how he could get his hands on the furs this old ape was sitting on.

"Another thing, Mr. Thompson. Your firm's agent probably won't be coming here any more. He won't risk sneaking past Kerry's customs line."

"Quite right," threw in Mr. Harlow, who had grasped what the skipper was driving at.

"Yes, Mr. Thompson," the skipper went on. "And you may find yourself sitting here with those furs rotting under you. With us it's different. We run a risk. If we slip through, all well and good. But your man Olaf represents a respectable house. Besides, his fifteen hundred ton schooner is too conspicuous to be wangled past the customs. So there you are, Mr. Thompson!"

The skipper got up, spat through the porthole and began pacing the little "saloon."

"What am I to do with my furs?" said Mr. Thompson in dismay.

"You know best. And now—you're an old-timer on

this coast—where'd you advise me to anchor so's we can get through our business as quick as possible? I shouldn't be surprised to see a Soviet gunboat start nosing around and haul me off to some port I wouldn't care to visit. I'm beginning to take those Soviet guys seriously!"

Mr. Thompson wiped his glasses again and said noncommittally:

"Well, you might try Enmakai. They say Alitet's got some furs to trade this season."

Mr. Thompson got into his boat with a heavy heart.

"Good-bye, Captain! Hope you do a good trade with Alitet. I think you'll find it to our mutual interest."

"Okay, Mr. Thompson!"

The heart of the *Polar Bear* began to throb. With sails set and a favourable wind the schooner was propelled northward under screw and canvas.

"I wonder what Thompson's feeling like just now, Harlow?"

"I think he'll sure throw a fit one o' these nights, Cap'n."

The smugglers burst out laughing. Mr. Harlow drew a flask out of his hip pocket and took several pulls at it.

"If he does go off his rocker—and I think he will—it would be a good idea for you, Cap'n, to get hitched with Mary on our way back. You'll never buy so many pelts as that gent has bought in a single winter."

The skipper clicked his tongue and said half-seriously:

"Not a bad idea that, Harlow! With an heiress like that the banks wouldn't kick up much fuss about coughing up the dough. I daresay it's a better idea than the one I had in mind when I was talking to pop."

Mr. Harlow chuckled and said insinuatingly:

"They say he has a couple of hundred thousand on his account. With a tidy sum like that one could make a go of it in the States."

CHAPTER TWO

The Enmakai settlement presented a changed appearance that summer. Not far from Alitet's yarang stood a new building of the type only to be met with among the Tangs. That building belonged to Alitet and served as a store. Its walls, made of light American sail-cloth stretched between posts driven into the ground, admitted sufficient light to dispense with windows. The roof, like that of Mr. Thompson's store, was made of corrugated galvanized sheeting. Even the feeble rays of the sun shining through the clouds were enough to warm it, and it was quite dry inside. From afar the store resembled a large rich dwelling.

But the riches were inside. From long walrus thongs strung up in five lines hung bunches of two and four pelts of white, red and silver foxes and polar wolves—in all about a thousand pelts. In one corner lay a neat pile of white bearskins, in another a huge heap of walrus ivory and whalebone.

Alitet carefully examined the pelts, shaking them out by the tails. Never before had Alitet possessed so many furs! Charlie had helped him to become a real trader. Alitet's eyes glistened when he thought of the big trade he was going to do.

Alitet's experienced eye was quick to notice any irregularities in the storage or defects in the treatment of the skins—either white foxes were not hanging in the right light, or red fox pelts had not been properly prepared, or the bearskins required looking over. His imperious voice rang out in the store and Tumatuge would come rushing in to do his bidding.

He quickly took down the pelts and cleaned off the superfluous fat and flesh with rye meal, never for a moment suspecting that bread could be made out of that flour.

His trading yarang had raised Alitet still higher in the estimation of all the hunters and trappers in the locality. Only Vaamcho and old Vaal regarded this new acquisition with eyes of hostility.

A young woman entered the store. This was Atteneut, Alitet's third wife, the sister of Narginaut his first wife. Alitet had brought her home quite recently, having taken her from Kaino without even the compensation of a bad dog.

"Tumatuge, show Atteneut how to cure the skins. She has never had a chance to learn it. Her husband Kaino is a trashy hunter and she rarely held a pelt in her hands."

After issuing sundry other orders Alitet stalked out of the store and betook himself to the lookout standing on a knoll. From this eminence Alitet usually watched passing herds of walruses and kept an observation on the sea. The post which served as the tower's support had been washed ashore and had evidently once been the mast of an old frigate. At its base was a cunningly wrought figure of a grandee of Catherine II's days in an elaborate and skilfully carved wig. Now the mast stood on the shore, planted in the ground, with the grandee's head peeping out from under the grass. Slats of wood nailed to the mast in the form of rungs led up to a small platform resembling the masthead of a ship.

Alitet climbed to the top, put his binoculars to his eyes and suddenly emitted a yell:

"A ship! A ship!"

People came running out of their yarangs. The dogs, infected by the general excitement, set up a loud barking. Men intently scanned the ice-free sea.

Alitet clambered down, thrust the binoculars into Tumatuge's hands and said:

"Go up and have a look what ship it is!"

Tumatuge swiftly climbed the pole, much to the

envy of all the men. Alitet permitted no one except Tumatuge to use the lookout.

"It's a schooner! Brown's coming!" shrieked Tumatuge.

Alitet shouted up:

"A schooner or a steamer?"

"A schooner, Alitet—with sails!"

"Are you sure?"

"It's a schooner, Alitet. My eyes see well. I recognize Brown's ship. The schooner has two masts."

"Don't any of you dare to go out to the schooner when it stops here," Alitet warned the hunters. "Let the Americans come ashore if they need us. They have a little boat."

Alitet went into his yarang, took off his fur shirt and put on an American checked shirt.

"Tygrena, change your fur clothes for cloth ones. The Americans will soon be here. Make a reindeer soup, quickly. And don't forget to put salt in it, the way I taught you. The Tangs do not like their food without salt. Be sure to lay out the Tang bowls, the iron fingers and knives—everything the way Charlie does. And stew the meat without water, only with white Tang fat. When the Tangs start eating don't grab the meat with your hands—use the iron fingers."

Tygrena busied herself cooking an American meal. "I would rather prepare dirty meat for the dogs than waste my time on this food," thought Tygrena with a sigh.

Alitet's wives each had their respective duties allotted to them. One took care of the dogs, another looked after the household and the third performed special tasks. Lately Alitet had taught Tygrena to prepare food in the American way.

He had bought a supply of mustard, pepper, onions and other spices. Plates, forks, table knives and other

things which he had seen on Charlie's table made their appearance in Alitet's household.

Of course, no one in the family, still less Alitet himself, had the least desire to taste this Tang food. But since a Tang did happen to drop in sometimes Alitet had to show that he too was a real Merican. On these occasions Tygrena cast off her fur garments and donned a cloth dress. For Alitet willed it so. He insisted upon introducing these foreign ways though they were as alien to him as they were to the rest of his household.

Alitet came in with a box containing an amazing assortment of strange foods—salt, onions, mushrooms, tomato sauce, dried potatoes, pepper and what not.

"Fancy making a stew out of all that stuff," thought Tygrena moodily. "Even the dogs would not touch it. Why spoil good reindeer meat with all this rubbish in little packages?"

Tygrena gingerly picked up an onion and began cutting it on the bare floor. Suddenly a sharp pain stung her eyes and they filled with tears. She flung the onion from her in disgust and began rubbing her eyes furiously.

"What is the sense in spoiling reindeer meat by putting this evil-smelling onion in it? Or this salt, which burns your tongue and all your mouth and makes you sick?"

Tygrena opened a tin of pepper. She decided to taste this black powder and tipped some of it onto her tongue. The next instant she dashed out of the yarang shrieking, flung herself on the ground and began hurriedly licking the snow.

Alitet came up.

"Why do you howl like a she-wolf?" he asked indifferently.

"I tried some of the Tang food," wailed Tygrena. "I fear I shall burst soon."

"You fool-woman—that is because you are not used to it. The Tangs eat it and still live. You will get used to it too. The schooner will soon be here. Hurry up and prepare the Merican food."

Tygrena's face flamed and she had a feeling in her mouth as though someone had lit a fire in it. She got up and went back into the yarang.

Meat was stewing in a pot. How delicious it smelled! Now this was real food. But she had to make it Merican—spoil it.

Tygrena threw a handful of salt into the pot. On second thoughts she added another handful, followed by a third. She peered into the box with a thoughtful air. What other package should she use for the Tang food? After a moment's reflection she emptied the contents of the whole box into the pot. Then she tasted it, spat and said:

"And the Tangs like that horrible food!"

CHAPTER THREE

The *Polar Bear* bore down on the Enmakai settlement in full sail. She swung round jauntily and lay to.

"Stand by to drop anchor!" commanded Captain Brown and forthwith executed the order himself. Steersman Harlow furled and lashed the sails. The schooner swung round on the tide.

The Americans lounged on deck while the people of the Enmakai settlement swarmed on the beach burning with curiosity. Alitet for some reason had forbidden them to go out to the schooner. Why he had done so no one could understand. It looked as though Alitet was turning Tang. His actions were becoming more and more puzzling and incomprehensible.

"What the hell are they dawdling about on the beach for? They don't seem to be in a hurry to come out. Jim, give 'em a turn on the foghorn!" growled Captain Brown, feeling rather nettled.

Jim seized the handle with alacrity and began turning it with might and main. The ship's siren emitted a series of earsplitting blasts. The diversion seemed to please the spectators on shore. They even stopped throwing pebbles into the water. But that was the only effect it had.

Captain Brown scanned the beach through his binoculars with a puzzled air.

"Have they anything to come out in, Skipper?"

"Don't be silly, Harlow! Can't you see their boats and even a whaleboat on the beach?" snapped the skipper, who was beginning to lose his temper.

"Probably those savages have gorged themselves with walrus meat and are too darned lazy to shove the boat off," said Harlow falling in with the captain's mood.

"Jim, stand by to lower the boat!"

"Aye, aye, Sir!"

Leaving the schooner riding at anchor the entire crew got into the boat and made for the shore.

Alitet, who was watching the Americans through a slit in the wall of his store, came out at this juncture and sauntered down to meet them. He stood out sharply among the rest of the crowd in his American shirt and eyeshade.

"Hello, Alitet!" cried Captain Brown from the boat.

The men standing on the beach caught the boat as its bows grounded on the pebbles and hauled it ashore with its occupants sitting in it.

"Why didn't you come out to the schooner? Have you become a poor man—nothing to barter for my goods? Or maybe you don't need them?" said the captain as he exchanged greetings with Alitet.

"Even a foolish hunter needs goods. I need them as well. And I have fox pelts. Do you see my store?"

"Oh, that's a fine store! But why didn't you come aboard the schooner?"

"The boats are strung up and it's a pity to run the whaleboat down over trifles. Besides, your boat is always handy—I knew that you had a little boat on the ship."

The Americans turned towards the settlement. The throng on the beach surged after them, but Alitet waved them back with an imperious gesture.

"What a big store!" observed the captain. "Now I can see that you are getting to be a real trader all right!"

Alitet grinned, and with a gesture towards the store, said proudly:

"In here are many white fox skins. All as white as snow. And all properly cleaned and treated. If you have brought plenty of goods we shall do a big trade. If you have little goods we shall wait for the next schooner."

Captain Brown, pretending not to have heard, hurried into the store. The sight that met his eyes took his breath away. The smuggler's eyes gleamed.

"This looks like business, boys!" he said, addressing his partners in English.

Hiding the admiration that shone in his eyes, the skipper walked slowly down the rows of hanging skins, shaking a pelt out here and there by the tail with a businesslike air, then turned to Alitet and let fall casually:

"No off-grade pelts?"

"Oh no!" answered Alitet shaking his head with a crafty smile. Then turning to Tumatuge he commanded sharply: "Bring me an off-grade fox from the yarang, quick!"

Tumatuge was gone in a flash and quickly reappeared with a darkish pelt having very short overhair and discoloured sides and handed it to Alitet.

"Here's an off-grade pelt: Look, Brown! You are a trader—you should know what an off-grade pelt is. I don't keep skins like this in my store. They are dumped in my yarang where my women make mittens out of them. These white foxes you see here are the very finest. They are very good pelts!" Alitet volubly assured him.

"Okay, Alitet! You'll get a lot of fine goods from me. Ever such a lot!" said Captain Brown as he left the store, which he did with an air of utter unconcern, as though he were not in the least interested in white foxes.

"Well, Alitet, and now come aboard the schooner and be my guest. You can have a look at my cargo while you're at it."

"I want to look at it here on the shore. I don't like the sea any more. I have even stopped hunting the walrus in my whaleboat. But first let us go to my yarang to eat. I want very much to treat Merican man. I told my woman to prepare a good reindeer, to cook the meat in the Merican way. I very much want to treat Merican man. I won't go to the schooner," Alitet said in a tone of finality.

"Jim, cut off back to the schooner and fetch some liquor, plenty of it. Step on it!" the skipper commanded.

"Only I want to do all the trading by myself, Captain. I don't want your goods to get into other hunters' hands. There is a hunter here named Vaamcho. He has three white foxes. He'll want to barter them. If you trade with him I'll shut my store."

"Oh, I understand! What do I want with his three pelts? Let some other schooner go about picking up three pelts at a time. I want to trade wholesale."

Jim did not keep them waiting long. The Americans burst noisily into Alitet's yarang and settled themselves on downy new reindeer skins.

Tygrena, who was acting as hostess, was thrown into confusion when the Americans shook her hand and

said something in a strange tongue. She had never shaken hands with anyone in her life. On top of this Jim had given her a pinch when no one was looking.

Soon plates, forks and spoons and a saucepan filled with a rich soup were placed on a low table.

"Here we are—quite like an American restaurant!" cried the skipper, winking at his companions and moving up to the table.

The Americans sat around the table in half-reclining attitudes. Alitet, too, squatted with his feet tucked under him, looking like a Budda.

"Jim, strikes me you have a crush on that gal, getting a proper eyeful you are," said the skipper.

"I notice you're taking in the sights, too, Cap'n," retorted Jim deferentially.

The three men burst into a laugh.

"I seem to be the only guy here who's keeping my weather eye open on business," put in Mr. Harlow as he fished out a bottle of whisky from a small grip.

"Cups!" commanded Alitet.

Tygrena bent over the table, placing out big enamelled mugs. Jim laid his hand on her back.

"Jim, you devil!" cried the skipper. "If only you'd tack on to the canvas in a gale as tight as you're sticking to this gal!"

"You're a happy-go-lucky beggar, Jim," added Mr. Harlow soberly. "You're forgetting business. Remember twelve of this firm's shares belong to you."

Captain Brown filled a mug to the brim and set it before Alitet.

"I don't want any whisky," said Alitet with a shrug. "Charlie said that a real trader drinks whisky after the deal. It is only hunters with two or three pelts who drink before striking a bargain! They need it to cheer them up. I'm cheerful enough as it is."

"Charlie's been telling you a pack of lies. I am a real

trading man, aren't I? And yet I'm going to drink—you just watch. On the contrary, a real trading man drinks before he starts business. I know better than Charlie." Saying which the captain drained his mug.

Mr. Harlow pushed the whisky over to Alitet and clinked mugs, saying coaxingly:

"Alitet wants to drink with me!"

But Alitet narrowed his oblique eyes, shrunk back and said with a protesting gesture:

"No, no, no!"

The Americans exchanged surprised glances.

"Looks like that ginger rat Thompson's been up to monkey tricks. He's put this guy up to this," growled the skipper.

"Yes, Sir—I think so too," said Harlow. "But never mind, Cap'n. He won't hold out long. I can see his mouth watering already."

Jim tasted a spoonful of soup and flung the spoon down with a gasp.

"Holy smokes, Cap'n, this stuff's murder! Tastes like fire!"

"Look here, Jim, we mustn't offend the host. You saw the pelts hanging in his store, didn't you? I'd eat live mice for them," said Harlow.

"I'll put you under hatches for a week unless you lick that plate up dry," said the captain grimly.

"Okay, Skipper! Let's hope you survive this bean-feast. If anything happens to me please send poor Jim's body to his mammy in Portland," said the cook and attacked the soup with the recklessness of despair.

Tygrena sat in a corner of the polog sewing. She was as curious as a seal and furtively watched the Americans.

They seemed to be eating that horrible food with gusto. She was greatly tempted to laugh, but there was no excuse for it—food is no laughing matter.

The Americans ate all the soup. Tygrena next served

them dry-stewed meat likewise generously flavoured and salted.

"Now, that's what I call real food! Cooked the American way!" said the captain encouragingly.

Jim spluttered and nearly choked.

"Well, Alitet, this fine food needs washing down with whisky—what do you say?"

But the guests drank once more by themselves.

Tygrena stared at the Americans as though fascinated. But who amazed her most was Alitet. Was he a Tang that he so greedily devoured this loathsome American food?

When they had at last waded through the dreary meal, which was no less an ordeal to Alitet than it was to his guests, the men went outside and gulped the fresh air into their lungs.

Vast flocks of wild ducks flew past with a loud squawking and whir of wings. They flew along the shore in an endless stream and it seemed as though this great migration to the north would never cease.

Nearby the settlement, where a little promontory jutted out into the sea across the path of the flying ducks, Alitet had rigged up a long net stretched between tall poles. The birds struck the net in full flight and were left fluttering and struggling with their heads caught in the meshes, while the flocks coming up behind, seeing the danger, soared upwards and continued their flight unmolested.

The *Polar Bear* lay riding at anchor in the offing. The Americans again invited Alitet to inspect the goods on board the schooner, but he flatly refused, saying:

"No, all trade goods are the same. They are not fox pelts—some good, some bad. There is no need to look at your cargo. We will trade here on shore."

The Americans, annoyed at his obstinacy, went into the store. Captain Brown, repressing his excitement,

walked round the rows of hanging pelts in silence. Suffering from the aftereffects of the execrable dinner he glared at the skins and resembled a beast of prey snapping its jaws at the baited hook. They were as good as his, but there was that sly-eyed devil to be taken into account—one never knew what he would be up to next, damn him! Whoever heard of a savage refusing whisky? But a fellow would be a crass idiot to let such a chance slip through his fingers. He wouldn't be Captain Brown if he didn't get those pelts at any price. Nothing short of murder would stop him from getting them, not if he had to resort to all the tricks of the pirate's game.

"Okay! Let's trade here then, on shore, in this fine store of yours," he cried with feigned cheerfulness, and sat down on the pile of bearskins with his feet planted wide apart and his hands clasping his knees.

"What goods do you want, Alitet?"

Alitet's brown face beamed. He swiftly pulled down two pelts, shook them before the captain's nose and said blandly:

"For these I want tobacco. Only tobacco!"

"Who does trade that way? We must figure out the value of all your furs and you'll get all the goods in a lump. You are not a foolish hunter, you are a real trading man."

"But I am foolish. We are all foolish. I don't know how to do trade in a lump. I did not buy the skins in a lump either, but one at a time. Let us trade little by little."

"Have you gone crazy, Alitet? If we trade pelt by pelt I shall be stuck here for a week. The ice will come up and throw my schooner ashore."

"No, it won't. I know there will be no ice yet. You ask me about the ice. I know all about it. Wait, I will go out and look at the sky and then I'll tell you for sure."

"There's no need to," said the captain in a tone of exasperation.

"Very good—no need to! Well, give me tobacco for these two pelts. Nothing but tobacco."

"Why, have you forgotten how to do trade—you demand one article in exchange for two pelts? That's not the way trade is done in America."

"I need a lot of tobacco. Oh, a lot! All the tundra dwellers are without tobacco. Everbody wants to smoke, but there is nothing to smoke. So what do you say?" persisted Alitet. "Afterwards I'll see—maybe I'll take some more tobacco for two more skins. I have to think! It's easy for them tundra people—all they know is, 'Give us tobacco.' But who must do all the thinking? Alitet must."

"Harlow, go out to the schooner with Jim and fetch over some Kentucky leaf. Bring a few cases of Black Navy plug tobacco, too, and a case of chewing tobacco," ordered the captain.

"Tumatuge, you go with them—you will help them. You can take my whaleboat now, their boat is too small," said Alitet.

The captain paced the store in silence. Alitet trotted beside him.

"We shall do a good trade, a long trade," he babbled. "Trading is a jolly business, like a big holiday. I shall tell Tygrena to make an American dinner for tonight and tomorrow. I do not grudge food for a good man."

The memory of his recent dinner brought a hiccough from the captain. His feelings choked utterance. It was all he could do to control his wrath and bring himself round to that cheerful frame of mind which was so essential for the serious business he had on hand.

A bale of Kentucky leaf tobacco was dragged into the store.

"Here, take one bale," said the captain, reaching out for the fox pelts which were slung over Alitet's shoulder.

Alitet handed over the skins and pulled down another pair, shook them out and said:

"Some more tobacco for these."

The captain's brows came down in a heavy scowl and he growled:

"Why, you have clean forgotten how to trade! I paid you a whole bale of tobacco for two pelts as a start, and you want more! Do you know that this bale holds a hundred and twelve English pounds? Do you think that Kentucky leaf tobacco can be picked up for the asking on the American coast? It's got to be paid for in dollars! It's not like catching a pair of white foxes which run around near your yarangs."

Alitet listened with half an ear, for he was busy with his own thoughts and calculations—"How much more tobacco do I need?"

After a pause he said:

"Alitet knows that tobacco grows on your coast like the grass in our river valleys. Very, very much grows there! I know. Charlie told me. . . . Here, take two more fox pelts for another bale."

The second bale was dragged in. In all four skins had been bartered. The captain surveyed the strung up pelts in dismay. There were about a thousand of them there, perhaps more. How long would he have to stay here before he finished trading with this savage? In any case it was plain that the ship's cargo would not suffice for this kind of barter.

Alitet placed one bale on top of the other and sat down on them. Tobacco! Here it was, tobacco! The pungent smell tickled his nostrils. He prized open a corner of the bale and pulled out a leaf. Filling his pipe with fresh tobacco he drew a sigh of contentment, grinned

and lit up. After a while he pulled down another couple of pelts and said:

"For these I want plug tobacco! And then I'll see, perhaps I'll take some more leaf."

The infuriated skipper flung the pelts he had bartered at Alitet's feet and ordered his men to take the goods back to the ship.

Jim none too politely pushed Alitet off the bales and with the help of Mr. Harlow began dragging them out. The smile on Alitet's face faded and was replaced by a frown. He shouted angrily at Tumatuge:

"Fool man! Why do you stand there with your hands down as if they had no bones? Help the white men carry the goods to the beach! Even I will help the Merican men!" and he took hold of a case.

This piece of savage cunning filled the cup of the captain's wrath.

"We'll do without your help! Let those things alone!" he raved, and seized two cases at once.

"Ai, ai, ai! The captain himself is working! What a shame! But another schooner will call on me for sure. You will find trade bad up north and will have to take your goods back to Merica."

Alitet skipped around the captain, pouring sympathy into his ears.

"The hunters up north have no pelts. What they had are now hanging in my store. But never mind. You go to them and see for yourself. Maybe they managed to trap some inferior summer foxes for you."

This derision threw the skipper into a towering rage and he turned on Alitet fiercely and told him to shut his mouth. Alitet went back to his store.

On the beach stood Vaamcho and old Vaal. To spite Alitet the captain said:

"Vaamcho, I hear you have three white foxes? Do you want these two bales of tobacco for them?"

Vaamcho stared at the captain in astonishment. Old Vaal said with a smile:

"Why so much? Vaamcho is not a trading man. We shall not smoke out two bales in all our lives."

Jim having loaded the boat the Americans pushed off, when suddenly Alitet appeared running towards them shouting: "Wait, wait!"

The Americans rowed hastily back to the shore, anticipating victory. Alitet ran up panting, and bringing out from under his shirt an ermine pelt, said to the captain:

"Here take this pelt. I have smoked a leaf out of your tobacco bale."

Captain Brown pushed off again without saying a word.

The *Polar Bear* swung round sharply and headed for Nordcap.

Alitet climbed the lookout and gazed long at the schooner until it was lost to view.

CHAPTER FOUR

The midnight sun dipped its rim into the cold sea. The whole horizon was aglow with the crimson sunset. The people of the Enmakai settlement were deep in slumber, and only the children romped about on the beach throwing pebbles into the sea and the old men pottered around outside the yarangs. Their day began when for all real hunters it was ending. The nocturnal Arctic sun exercised an exciting effect on the children who raced up and down the beach chewing sea cabbage and ran off to the lakes in the tundra to gather ducks' eggs. Of the adult hunters Tumatuge alone did not sleep. Alitet had ordered him to sit on the watch tower with a pair of binoculars and keep a lookout for any other ship that might appear.

Alitet tossed about on his bed of skins, unable to fall asleep. "It is no good that Brown got so angry. Maybe he will tell men that Alitet is no good and none of the captains will want to come near Enmakai?"

The crew of the *Polar Bear* as it came down the coast were in an equally bad humour.

"What d'you think, Cap'n—are we doing right to go back to Alitet?"

"Right or wrong, Harlow, we've got no choice. What else can you suggest? Wait for old Stefanson on his *Yukon* to sneak through under our noses? He's got the scent of a retriever, he has. He's a descendant of the ancient pirates, you know—got real Anglo-Saxon blood flowing in his veins. They've sailed all the seas and oceans and there isn't a nook or cranny in any part of the world they didn't get their hands into, except these godforsaken shores, and he's taking care of them now. He's been nosing around here for the last few years. Not likely that he'll miss that store of Alitet's, damn him! Then don't forget that squint-eyed devil was telling the truth after all. I guess he really did mop up all the pelts along the coast, the goddam son of a bitch! He's hotter'n ginger Charlie to deal with. Thank goodness this looks like being our last trip out. So there you have the situation, Harlow!"

"That's all right, Cap'n. We shan't do so bad, even under those crazy conditions of his," said Harlow.

"Sure. Still, less than I figured on. Anyway, we can't go picking up odd pelts all along the damn coast—we haven't the time for it. The delay's too risky."

Captain Brown bent over the speaking tube and shouted down:

"Full speed ahead, Jim!"

At midnight Alitet was awakened by Tumatuge's voice:

"Alitet, a schooner's coming!"

Alitet scrambled to his feet with youthful agility. Dressing hastily he rushed to the lookout.

"Brown's coming back!" shouted Tumatuge pointing seawards.

Alitet, with an imperious wave of the hand commanded Tumatuge to climb down and went up in his place. What he saw threw him into such a frenzy of delight that he nearly toppled off the platform. A broad grin spread over his face as he clambered down.

"I have gone to sleep," he said. "Let nobody disturb me! Unless the Merican himself comes ashore and goes into my yarang—then let him wake me."

Alitet divested himself of all his clothes and soon the yarang resounded to his loud and peaceful snores.

The *Polar Bear* dropped anchor in the old spot and the Americans, no longer acting the haughty traders, promptly lowered their boat and came ashore.

"Where is Alitet?" asked Captain Brown.

"Alitet sleeps. He said he was not to be disturbed. . . . But you may waken him if you wish," replied Tumatuge.

"Okay," said the captain gruffly, and the Americans went into Alitet's yarang.

"A-ah! Brown!" said Alitet, rubbing his eyes. "Brown has come again? I like Merican man very much."

"You were right, Alitet. I went to Yakan Cape, but the trappers there didn't have any pelts. They had nothing to barter."

"I knew, I told you so. I like meeting Merican man very much," said Alitet, and turning to Tygrena commanded: "Quick, quick, make Merican soup! The same as yesterday, and we'll go in the meantime to the store."

"For Christ's sake, Cap'n, let me stay here and help the lady with the cooking. Otherwise he'll make us eat that devil's mess again!" implored Jim.

"Okay. Alitet, my Jim will help your wife with the cooking. He cooks for us too."

"Ai, ai, ai, that is good! Let Jim teach Tygrena how to cook. I am tired of explaining this woman's work."

So Jim and Tygrena were left alone in the yarang. Jim pulled a chef's cap out of his pocket, clapped it on his head and struck such a comical pose that Tygrena burst out laughing. Then he took the cap off and put it on Tygrena's head. Suddenly he threw his arm around her and crushed her to him.

Tygrena quivered with rage. Her eyes blazing she wrenched herself free, seized a chunk of reindeer meat that was lying on the floor and struck Jim across the face with it with all her might.

"Oho-o!" said an amazed Jim, wiping the reindeer blood from his face. "Not a bad poultice, that! Well, Cap'n, you and I ain't got much luck this trip!"

"All you Tangs are like mad dogs!" said Tygrena angrily. "That red-nosed Charlie, too—he made me lose my wits that time. . . . Aye fought him, and I too have learned to fight."

Tygrena picked up a sharp knife.

Not understanding what Tygrena was saying, but seeing that she was thoroughly roused, Jim sat down on the skins smiling nervously. Tygrena silently pushed the reindeer meat over to him and tossed him the knife. Jim took it and explained by signs that it was not big enough. He pulled out his jackknife, cut off a slice of meat and began beating such a vigorous tattoo on it that Tygrena burst out laughing again. It seemed to her that the young American was making magic. That was how Korauge the shaman beat his drum.

"Come here, I'll show you how to make a steak. Look, this is the way you have to beat it," explained Jim by the aid of signs.

Tygrena did as he told her, laughing all the while. She could not understand why she had to beat the reindeer meat so hard.

Jim looked at Tygrena and for the first time the thought struck him: "What rotters we are! After all they're human beings with human feelings and desires."

And strange to say, Jim felt ashamed of himself.

CHAPTER FIVE

The trading with Alitet had been going on for a long time. At the end of the third day the store was stacked high with goods. The hunters and even the women lent an eager hand in dragging in the cargo and everybody smoked himself dizzy with fresh tobacco.

Alitet crawled about over the merchandise, carefully examining each case and bale and going over in his mind: "Now, what else do I need. I must not miss anything before Brown goes away. Oi, my head will burst with all this thinking."

He would pull down a pair of white or red foxes and demand more tobacco, cartridges, whisky, bunting, beads, knives, needles, traps, Winchesters and numerous other things that hunters needed.

"Lumme, Cap'n, I believe that squint-eyed heathen intends to skin us alive! I swear he will!" cursed Jim, bent beneath the weight of packages he was hauling into the store.

"Don't worry Jim. Things are not going so bad. He's not driving such a hard bargain. He's infected by the general mood, drunk with joy, and getting more tractable," the skipper reassured him.

White, red and silver foxes flowed in a continuous stream into the captain's canvas bags. But the schooner's holds were emptying too. Alitet, his face beaming with satisfaction, fondled the packages, slapped the Winchesters affectionately and kept stacking away pile after pile

of merchandise. Never before had Enmakai known such a holiday!

At the end of the fifth day Jim reported:

"Cap'n, there's nothing left aboard except the rest of the crew—two rats. They've got plenty of room now to promenade in!"

Captain Brown cast a longing look at the remaining furs, the pile of bearskins, the walrus tusks and the whalebone, and said:

"There are no more goods left on the schooner, Alitet. All sold out." And slapping Alitet on the back, added: "Well, are you pleased, Alitet?"

"Very, very good! Very pleased!"

"Do you want to trade with me the same way next year?"

"Ai, very much! I want to trade only with you!"

"Cap'n, it breaks my heart to see all the stuff that's left here—honest it does!"

"You just keep your mouth shut, Jim. I've got a little plan of me own."

"And now I very much want to treat you. The meal is ready. Tygrena has quickly learned to work with Jim. Come to my yarang!"

"Okay! Come on!" the captain readily agreed. "You are right, Alitet. It is good to drink whisky when the trading is finished."

"Yes, yes. Now we can drink. Now it is very good! My heart has been asking for firewater."

Alitet and the Americans squatted round the little table. Mugs of whisky were passed round and tossed off. Harlow refilled the mugs. A loose was given to mirth.

"Well, Jim, seems to me you're getting on with the missus like a house on fire?" said the skipper.

"That'll be written off against his account when we share the proceeds of the furs," said Harlow.

"Ah, gentlemen!" said Jim sadly. "How mistaken people are sometimes!"

Meanwhile the whisky had gone to Alitet's head and he mumbled thickly:

"Alitet is right.... Alitet knows everything. Didn't Alitet say there would not be any ice and the schooner would not be stranded.... We could do plenty more trade and still no ice would come."

"That's true, Alitet, very true. You know all about it," intoned the captain. "We could trade for a long time yet! Do you know what I want to tell you, Alitet? Those furs that you've still got left in your store with the bearskins, tusks and whalebone ought to be loaded on the ship. If a storm comes up it will be bad sailing in an empty ship. It may capsize and we'll all be drowned—and I shan't be here to bring you more goods next year."

Alitet grew alert.

"If you want I can give you a paper for them and we can trade that paper separately next year. That's always done by traders," the captain said gravely.

Alitet pondered this. Then he recalled that Charlie traded papers, too, and believed in them as though they were real goods. He jumped to his feet and said quickly:

"Wait, I'll first go and count how many pelts are left."

"Skipper, you're a genius!" exclaimed Harlow.

"Hold on a bit, keep quiet or you'll scare the bird."

The Americans sat on in silence until Alitet returned.

"Two hundred and thirty pelts, Captain! Write a paper!" cried Alitet, running in.

Captain Brown pulled a notebook out of his breast pocket and began unscrewing the cap of his fountain pen with great deliberation and solemnity.

Alitet closely watched the captain "working" on pa-

per. His scrutiny, however, in no way disconcerted the captain, who wrote the following:

"Good-bye, you squint-eyed devil! You've been a pain in the neck for me these five days, blast you and whoever it was put you up to this kind of trading. Don't worry—the rest of the furs will just put me right. So will the bearskins, damn you! They'll find a buyer in America. Good-bye again, this time for good. Yours truly

Taki Black Beetle."

"There you are, Alitet—here's the paper!" said Captain Brown gravely.

Alitet carefully folded the paper and put it in the pocket of his American shirt.

Soon the *Polar Bear* was speeding merrily on its way towards the coast of Alaska. Captain Brown came out of the cabin and went over to the wheel where Harlow was standing on the watch. The captain was holding a leaf from his notebook covered with figures and laughing heartily.

"Hell, he's fleeced us properly! That's never happened to me in all my born days. Those white fox pelts have worked out at over six dollars apiece."

Jim's head emerged through the engine-room hatch.

"All the same it's a pity we're not coming back next year, Cap'n. I'd be real glad to have another look at this coast."

"To look up Alitet's missus, you mean?"

"Maybe! But you're on the wrong tack, Harlow, if you think bad of her. It's queer, but the way she acted she sort o' made me feel that we're pretty darned rotters."

"What?!" roared the captain.

CHAPTER SIX

Korauge the shaman beat his drum for two nights in succession on the occasion of his son's good trade with the Americans. Alitet let himself go with a vengeance and drank hard and deep for two days and two nights. The long and difficult trade with the crafty American had taxed his powers to breaking point and left him spent and exhausted. Yet there was a keen satisfaction in the knowledge that Enmakai now possessed a real big trading yarang, like that of Charlie Red Nose. And the boss of that yarang was Alitet himself.

Two days previously five young men had run off to the hills with glad tidings for the reindeer nomads—Alitet was inviting them down to do big trading. The heralds ran without stopping, eager to bring the good news. Its bearers would be greeted as old friends and feasted with choice morsels of reindeer meat, and who knows but the reindeer men might be generous enough in their delight to give them a present of reindeer skins for winter clothes.

At the close of the fourth day men began to arrive from the hills. They came with staffs in their hands and waterproof sealskin haversacks on their backs. But they had no furs in these sacks, for Alitet had collected all their fox pelts in the spring.

To Enmakai, too, came hunters and trappers who had not yet given Alitet any skins at all. But their need for goods was great and they hoped that Alitet would not refuse them.

Never before had the Enmakai settlement seen such bustle and such crowds. Tea stood boiling in a huge cauldron in the open air and men could drink it as much as they wanted—and with sugar too! Men discussed the recent calving season and related the news from their settlements. There was talk without end.

At midday trade began. Alitet opened his store and the crowd surged in through the narrow door. Alitet allowed everyone to take whatever he wanted. Each man was to figure out for himself how much he could carry away and what he needed. Nothing was weighed, nothing was checked—and every one took only what he actually needed and not a thing more. Every article taken would be carefully remembered and if Alitet asked two years hence what a man had taken everything would be enumerated down to the last needle and box of matches!

There was only one restriction in their freedom of choice. Each man had to take no less than five traps from Alitet's store.

On one side stood a box of plug tobacco. Anyone who wished could go up and fill his pipe for nothing.

The whole crowd in the store was smoking. The doorway belched clouds of smoke, like the funnel of a steamer. Those who preferred quid tobacco helped themselves from another box. You could not smoke or chew so freely in the hills—there one had to use tobacco sparingly. Who said this was not a real holiday!

Men were setting aside goods for themselves who had not yet trapped any foxes. But they would trap them some day, wouldn't they? And Alitet said to them:

"Take whatever you need, come on! Help yourselves! Don't forget the traps. If you won't have any foxes next year you will give them to me later, when you catch them."

Alitet's heart rejoiced as he looked upon this big trading. But it would be still better in the winter when he would sit down in his sledge and ride the round of all the settlements collecting all the available fox pelts, white, red and silver. He would not even look at them, but simply say: "Throw them into my sledge!" And

there were going to be many pelts! There would now be double the number of traps in the tundra.

Alitet said to Tumatuge:

"There are many guests in our settlement. Let them be feasted with meat in every yarang. Let them go in groups of five and ten to each yarang. Let the meat be given out from my pits."

"Ehei!" cried Tumatuge and dashed off as fast as his legs could carry him to spread the joyful news.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Arctic summer of the year 1923 was a particularly favourable one for navigation. The entire coast line was free of ice, the large masses of which had been driven far north by the south winds that prevailed here at this time of the year.

The steamship *Soviet* was entering the Bering Strait bound for the Kolyma coast which had not been receiving supplies from the mainland for many years and where Whiteguard bands had long been disturbing the peace of the northern inhabitants.

The *Soviet* had on board the chief of the Special Service Detachment, Tolstukhin, and the representative of the Kamchatka Revcom assigned to the Chukotsk Region, Los.

"Well, Los, here's your district—take a look at it," said Tolstukhin. "You go ashore today. You'll get a view of your residence as soon as we enter the strait."

"Then I'll soon be seeing my Martians?"

"What Martians?"

"Well, don't they live here as on another planet?"

"Yes, you're right. Here's a country spreading before you for over two thousand kilometres. Go ahead, take over control! But you'll have to forget about your ar-

moured train, my dear fellow. They've got nothing but dog-teams here."

"Well, I don't mind the dog-teams for a change," replied Los gravely.

Commissioner Los was a man of huge stature, slow in movement and speech, but swift in decision and action. Ex-commander of an armoured train in the civil war, he had, on arriving at Kamchatka, received an assignment to the Chukotsk Region. His idea of the territory was vague, and now, standing on the deck of the *Soviet*, he intently scanned the lifeless rock-bound wastes that stretched before him.

The Bering Strait resembled a huge placid lake with native hunters' boats scudding over its smooth surface. Their dwellings stood huddled amid a chaos of rock, clinging to the sheer cliffs overlooking the sea like so many birds' nests.

It seemed an odd and inconvenient spot to choose for a home. But the sea hunters and trappers who inhabited it were used to it and loved the place. Every rock and ledge and notch in the hillside was dear to them with memories of childhood. They clambered up and down the sheer slopes in their soft skin boots with the agility of mountain goats. They would have found it dull walking on flat stretches without these rocks.

There was always good walrus hunting in the strait, where large herds passed on their way to the Arctic Ocean as through the gateway of a spacious yard. And where there is walrus there is a life of plenty. This was the edge of the world. From here, looking across the strait, one could glimpse the mountains of Alaska looming dimly in the northeast.

The mist lifted and the sun shone out. It did not set at all at this time of the year. The silent Chukchi yarangs stood out in grey patches on the coast like clinging lichen on stones.

"It's a pity I didn't learn anything about the country before coming out," said Los. "All I know about it is its approximate area, which I measured by the captain's chart. And this was called a county—some county, eh! Over four hundred thousand square kilometres!"

"My dear man! Who d'you think was going to give you information about this region? We haven't yet got the Soviet men who have studied it," remarked Tolstukhin.

"I sent a young fellow out here from Petropavlovsk last winter by dog sledge," said Los. "A clever fellow. A student. Studied at the geographical faculty. Speaks several languages. He learned Chukchi, too, from an old professor. I felt pretty rotten when I saw him off on that long journey. Who knows whether he made it or not?"

"Yes, Los, there's not a square mile anywhere on this vast territory from which one could send a radio message. A man who steps on these shores can truly be said to disappear into thin air."

Two islands appeared in the distance—great rocky piles.

"The captain says one of them's ours, the smaller one American," said Los, his keen eye searching the distance.

"Let me have your binoculars a minute, Tolstukhin!" he asked, and when he had gazed his fill, said: "Take a look, there's a two-masted ship over there. That's the first one we've met."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, Los! Why, it must be the American steamer *Beachaimo* carrying cargo for the new trading posts on the Chukotsk coast. D'you remember them talking about it at the Revcom? Here, let's have a look."

After a while Tolstukhin said:

"Some little schooner."

They stood watching the schooner which at first bore down on them, then suddenly altered its course and closed in with the islands.

Tolstukhin and Los joined the captain on the bridge.

"What's that boat over there, Captain," asked Los, holding his binoculars out to the captain.

"I've seen it. My binoculars are a little stronger than yours. A smuggler, the *Polar Bear*. Notorious boat. But don't try to persuade me to give chase—the schooner is in extraterritorial waters. Today it will be in Alaska."

They gazed at the receding schooner and began smoking.

"Well, Comrade Los, we'll soon be saying good-bye. Maybe I'll drop in on the return voyage if I don't get caught in the ice," said the captain.

Soon the *Soviet* put into the roadstead and anchored off the coast facing a large native settlement. The steamer sounded its siren. A boat swiftly approached the ship.

"Los, Los, come here! Some of your Martians are coming," said Tolstukhin.

Los ran to the starboard side. He instantly recognized Zhukov among the native occupants of the boat. A joyful smile lit up his face and he cried out at the top of his voice:

"Andrei! You're alive! That's grand! Come up here quick and let me give you a hug."

"In a minute, Nikita Sergeyevich!" replied Zhukov and clambered up the ladder.

Los caught Andrei in his embrace and almost crushed the breath out of him. Releasing his vice-like grip he stepped back a pace and flinging out his arms, cried:

"Well, it does my heart good to see you! I feel as though I had come home!"

"I've been expecting you a long time, Nikita Sergeyevich. Even started to miss you."

"And those men who have come out with you—are they decent fellows?"

"They're friends, Nikita Sergeyevich. I've already managed to make a lot of friends here. They're a wonderful people!"

"Fine, that's fine! Let's go and get acquainted, scout."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Winter had not yet set in, but the strait was already heavily blocked with ice. The Arctic summer might not have been, so swiftly had it passed.

Heavy snowfalls, followed by keen north winds, set in. A blizzard sprang up. The dwellings were buried in huge snowdrifts.

Among the native yarangs there appeared the new hut of the Revcom commissioner, which, being of a square shape, was snowed under more heavily than the stream-line yarangs. Very soon it was completely buried and the smoke from its chimney seemed to be coming up from under the snow.

"It's good that we're snowed under," said Zhukov. "It's warmer with the snow, seeing we can't keep the place properly heated."

The *Soviet*, in its hurry to reach Kolyma, had not had time to unload all the supplies required by the Revcom. The captain had promised to land the rest of the cargo on his way back, but the steamer had not shown up, and there was no means of ascertaining what had happened to it. It had either passed them or become icebound.

The Chukotsk Revcom's premises consisted of fifteen square metres of floor space. The back part of the hut served as living quarters. Here, divided only by a little bedside table, stood the two cots of Los and Zhu-

kov, partitioned off from the rest of the hut by a bright calico curtain. The official premises were somewhat more impressive. Here stood two writing desks, a couple of bentwood chairs and a homemade bench.

Against the wall near the door stood a cupboard fastened on a large padlock and sealed. This was the letter box, as witnessed by the drawing of a specimen addressed envelope over the slit with the following address written in a calligraphic hand:

Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka

Gubernia Revcom.

Representative of Kamchatka Gubernia Revcom

for the Chukotsk County

No. 123

This gigantic letter box was to be opened only upon the arrival of a steamer, when the navigation season opened.

It was cold in the Revcom office. Coal was used only for cooking. Los, clad in a reindeer jacket and loose fur trousers, with an old Red Army cloth helmet sitting tight on his head, sat bent over his desk. A full-grown blond beard covered his chest.

Los, with head lowered, was wrapped in thought, as though struggling with some difficult problem. Now and again he raised his head, and a pair of bright blue eyes looked out from under bushy overhanging brows.

Zhukov was pacing up and down the little room, talking about the local inhabitants. He, too, was dressed very warm. His fur torbazes were strapped to his belt and a warm foxskin cap with long flaps reaching to his waist added height to his tall figure.

"What you're telling me, Andrei, is very interesting," said Los, listening to the blizzard howling outside.

Los had once been a good engine driver, but ever since he had parted with his armoured train he had had no more occasion to see a locomotive. Once, on passing the railway station in Vladivostok Los had stopped near the track and stood listening a long time to the distant hooting of Soviet locomotives in various places along the Pacific coast. And now, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean he was listening to the howling of the blizzard and the crashing of the pack ice.

"Andrei, what instructions did you receive from the Revcom on coming out here?"

"The main thing, Nikita Sergeyevich, was to first get acquainted with the region and the population. That's what Volny, the Revcom Chairman, told me—get acquainted with the people for the time being and make a note of all the traders."

"So communication with Petropavlovsk by dog trail is possible, it seems?"

Zhukov smiled.

"Of course. I came that way. But for practical purposes it's useless. It took me four months."

Los chewed his beard, then said:

"How the devil are we going to live here? From one steamer to the next? We must get a wireless outfit. . . . Well, Andrei, go on."

Zhukov began pacing the room again and continued:

"This outlying region was not included in the administrative system until just before the Revolution. The tsarist county chief made an attempt in 1915 to set up village elders, but nothing came of it. He was more interested in the furs out of the government stores and drank like a fish. The Cossacks weren't any better than their chief. Before he died in 1916 of delirium tremens Dyadenko, the county chief, ordered his body to be buried on a hill overlooking Providence Bay, so that he could see the passing ships."

"He must have been one of my countrymen, a canny Ukrainian," said Los with an amused smile.

"The country was governed according to unwritten laws by a bunch of unscrupulous hucksters. There are adventurers here from Alaska, too."

"We'll drive 'em out!" said Los determinedly.

"They are men of all kinds of nationalities," went on Zhukov. "Norwegians, Danes, Americans, Letts, Ossetians, Russians, Ingushes, Ukrainians. There's a German and an Austrian Baptist—an ex-prisoner of war. Many of them have married Chukchi and Eskimo women and settled down. By establishing blood relations with the natives they are better able to carry on their trade. The local kulaks act as middlemen between them and the large nomad group of reindeer herders. They all lead a secluded life and have dealings only with the schooners that come from Alaska. . . ."

"Never mind! We'll sweep all that refuse out of here, Andrei. But I can see you've got the proper hang of things out here."

"I made a study of the region from Tan-Bogoraz's books while in Petrograd."

Los replenished the stove sparingly and raked up the coals.

"What particularly struck me here, Nikita Sergeye-
vich, is these people's extraordinary love for children. Grownups talk to children as though they are equals. Oddly enough, they even consult them sometimes. I get on well with the kiddies—that's one of the reasons I've made so many friends among the hunters and the old men."

That evening Los busied himself with pen and paper. When he had finished writing he folded up the paper neatly and handed it to Zhukov.

"That's for the mail—about means of communication. Leave yourself a copy. We'll need the copies when it comes to drawing up the annual report."

Zhukov went through the outgoing mail, put it into an envelope and dropped it in the letter box.

A group of youngsters and a young girl came running unembarrassedly into the Revcom house.

"Sit down, sit down!" cried Los, moving up the bench.

"These are my pupils, Nikita Sergeyevich. Some of them have learned to read a little. Maybe they'll become Komsomols,* eh?"

"Of course they will!"

Hearing the barking of a passing dog-team the children rushed outside.

"You just said they might become Komsomols, Andrei. But we can't even organize a Party or Komsomol group. I'm the only Communist Party member here, and you're the only Komsomol member. Such a huge country—bigger than Europe. But we'll make Communists and Komsomols out of them, mark my word! It's too bad, though, that we haven't any means of communication.... All our reports and enquiries will not leave that 'letter box' until next summer, and we shan't get replies until the year after that. That's the trouble, my friend! Talk of getting things done snappily! This is not like dashing about in an armoured train," said the Revcom commissioner with a rueful smile, and throwing his fur parka over his shoulders he went outside.

Los, too, was fond of children, and the latter were not long in taking to this bearded big man. They would romp about him in a crowd, shouting:

"Russki Los! Russki Los!"

He would seize some little urchin in his huge hands and toss him up in the air or hold him over his head, while the women would gaze at this unusual scene from the doorways of their yarangs, smiling into the broad sleeves of their parkas.

* Young Communist League members.—*Trans.*

Los, for all his good humour and apparent phlegm, was a man of great will power, swift decisions and irresistible energy.

The name of this daring commander of the armoured train in the civil war had struck terror into the hearts of a cruel and crafty enemy. The Japanese interventionists, too, had experienced the taste of his swift and terrible attacks. He had been in many difficult and dangerous situations, but he had always contrived to emerge with flying colours.

But here, in this new and unusual situation, he felt as though he were tied hand and foot.

Los keenly felt his ignorance of the language too. He was distressingly aware of this handicap which prevented him from having a heart to heart talk with the people, telling them about the Soviet Government, about what it thought of doing, and the best way of organizing life in this region.

"Andrei, I can't go out of the house without you," he would say to Zhukov. "Come on! Let's have a chat with the people."

People would gather in some large yarang and they would sit talking into the early hours of morning with Zhukov acting as interpreter.

The next day the news gathered from this talk would fly from mouth to mouth all along the coast, being conveyed by the local "torbaz telegraph" from camp to camp and hunter to hunter.

The Russian chief was known to people who lived in the remotest spots along the coast and who had never yet set eyes on him.

Los doggedly studied Chukchi, over which he spent whole days and sometimes nights. His vocabulary notebook had become so voluminous that reference to it always entailed a long search. Los rearranged the words and phrases according to a new classification of his own,

for which purpose he rewrote the whole notebook. He now had two books. In one he wrote down the words in alphabetical order, in the other he wrote out conversational phrases under special headings, such as: "General Conversation," "Trade Conversation," "Conversation on Dogs," and many other stock phrases for all occasions.

Los was the first to wake up in the morning, when he would shout to his friend and secretary:

"Andrei, time to get up! You'll sleep yourself into a scurvy!"

And, still lying in their fur sleeping bags with only their heads thrust out, they would put their caps on and begin the working day.

"Well, Andrei, check up my lessons."

And Los would roll off his new acquisition of Chukchi words and phrases: klyaul—man, neusket—woman, haimychilen—rich man, vyletkurken klyaul—trading man, and so on.

"Well, how am I getting on, Andrei?"

"Quite good, Nikita Sergeyevich! Much better than I expected."

"You wait, my dear fellow! I'll soon be delivering a lecture in Chukchi. How do you say 'go away' in Chukchi?"

"Kanto."

"Ah, kanto off then! Go and make arrangements about the sledges. We're going out to the coast today to hold elections to the Settlement Committees and Tribal Soviets. Meanwhile, I'll make some fritters. We'll soon forget what bread tastes like."

"I've been told that Thompson bakes his bread over an oil lamp. I wanted to try it but never had time," said Zhukov.

Los dressed himself and began poking the stove.

"Kanto off, hurry up!" he repeated with a smile. "I'll remember that word now!"

CHAPTER NINE

Mr. Simons lounged easily in Mr. Thompson's rocking chair, smoking fragrant Capstan. Mr. Simons was the North Company's local representative in charge of the fur trading post. He acted simultaneously as fur buyer, salesman, warehouseman and clerk, and believed that one man was more than enough to cope with these duties. Time hung heavily on his hands. A spare blond man of thirty with a cold haughty face and lacklustre eyes, he was disgusted with everything here and often regretted the impulse that induced him to come out to this "savage" country for the sake of high pay. He hated the hunters, he hated their clothes and their smiling faces. He was even glad that they rarely visited his trading post, little suspecting that this was Thompson's and Alitet's handiwork.

Mr. Simons had the fastidious habit of wrapping his handkerchief round the door handle before touching it to enter a place.

It was already the height of winter and Mr. Simons felt bored to death. Three months had passed since the *Beachaimo* had weighed anchor after having set Mr. Simons ashore together with a hastily assembled house and store and stocks for the trading post.

The loneliness would have been unendurable were it not for the society of Charles Thompson, the only other civilized man in the place. Luckily Mr. Thompson was staying another year. At least he had someone to talk to in the long winter evenings.

Every morning, on awakening, Mr. Simons leisurely dressed himself and went to Mr. Thompson's shanty. Not even a blizzard could detain him. A rope ran from the North Company's trading post to Mr. Thompson's dwelling and Mr. Simons held on to it when he made his way in the dark.

He had his meals with Mr. Thompson. In the morning they would drink coffee and eat tinned fruits. Then Mr. Simons would listen to Mr. Thompson's stories, or they would play a game of patience, and on Sundays wind up the gramophone. And so they beguiled the long northern hours from day to day by the light of a solitary oil lamp. On taking his leave Mr. Simons would say with an ironical smile:

"Good-bye, Thompson—time's money you know!"

One evening, when Simons had brought a bottle of whisky for supper, they sat chatting for a long time like old friends.

"Mary!" called Charlie. "Some more coffee."

Mary was surprised. It was always her mother who served the coffee. She slipped on a dress and went into the room.

"Bring a cup for yourself and sit down to the table with us. It's Sunday today," her father said.

Charlie had never invited his daughter to the table before. Mary was bewildered. She couldn't understand it.

"Come on, sit down," her father said, taking her hand.

"Very pretty daughter you have, Thompson," said Simons drily. "Does she speak English?"

"No," answered Thompson ruefully.

The gramophone was playing. Mr. Simons' hard stare made Mary feel uncomfortable. She hastily finished her coffee and suddenly darted to the door.

"Oh, don't go, Miss Mary—aren't we going to dance?"

But Mary had already disappeared.

"She doesn't dance, Simons."

"She should be taught then. A girl ought to be able to dance. I can give her some lessons...."

They lit up their pipes and smoked in silence.

"Well, Simons, coming back to what I was saying—I

simply can't make out why the North Company has been given the monopoly of trade here. Monopolies debar competition and trade can't exist without competition."

"I agree with you there, Thompson. But you're forgetting one thing—we're dealing with the Russian ministry of trade. Everything is now monopolized in Soviet Russia. Private enterprise practically doesn't exist any more." Mr. Simons got up and spread his hands with a hopeless gesture. "There's nothing we can do about it. We're not the bosses here."

"But how are businessmen going to live in Russia?"

Mr. Simons' shrug was eloquent of his utter lack of ideas on that score.

That evening their talk was of a particularly cordial nature.

"So what are your plans for the future, Thompson?"

"I'll probably go back to the States next summer."

"Well, naturally. I could never understand, Thompson, how you could have spent the best part of your life out here. In this little hole of a room, without a bath, without a car, without flowers! I can't imagine it.... My wife died, I'm childless—that's the only reason which induced me to take on this job—that and, of course, the big pay attached to it. But heaven forbid I should stay on here another year! Half a lifetime! It's awful, Thompson!"

"Oh, a fellow gets used to it, Simons. Has your wife been dead long?"

"Two years. I'm all alone in the world now. I intend to make a little on this job and go to Canada and set up in business. And you, Thompson—have you put by anything for a rainy day, if it isn't a business secret?"

"My business days are over, Simons." Thompson fell silent, then resumed: "To be frank, I've taken a liking

to you. Your company has given me great pleasure this year, Simons. You're a real good guy. I don't mind taking you into my confidence."

Mr. Thompson got up and walked over to his strong-box. He paused halfway and said:

"You're the first man, not counting the bank clerks, to learn how much I've got."

Mr. Thompson unlocked the box and drew out a sheaf of papers which he laid on the table with trembling hands, saying in a voice full of emotion:

"I hope you won't abuse an old man's confidence, Simons."

Mr. Simons hastily drew his chair up.

"Here, take a look. A hundred thousand dollars in one bank, not counting interest. The same sum in another bank. And thirty-seven thousand in a third. Not a cent more anywhere."

Mr. Simons gasped.

"Why, you're worth a quarter of a million, Thompson!"

"No, Simons," said Thompson with a sigh. "I tried hard to bring it up to that figure but didn't manage it!"

"Oh, a mere thirteen thousand short—that doesn't count!"

"Still, a nice round figure's better to look at, Simons!"

Thompson replaced the papers in his strongbox and said:

"Would you care for some more coffee?"

"No, thanks, Thompson. It's getting late."

Mr. Simons' sleep was restless that night. He spun brightly coloured dreams of marrying Mary.

CHAPTER TEN

The new trading post, like Thompson's buildings, stood on the seashore. Mr. Simons' house communicated with the store by a narrow passage. The arrangements were very convenient for the North Company's representative who had everything close at hand. The store was well stocked with trade goods and Mr. Simons had long since put everything in perfect order.

Mr. Simons did not know the Chukchi language, nor did he have any intention of learning it. He spoke a little Russian, however. In his dealings with the natives Yarak acted as his interpreter.

The day's trading over, Mr. Simons closed his store and betook himself to Thompson's house. After a good dinner Mr. Thompson, excusing himself, stepped out into the passage and said to his daughter:

"Mary, you'll go to Mr. Simons today and take dancing lessons."

"I won't go to Sime! I don't need lessons! I can dance better than Sime," she answered pertly.

"You're the daughter of an American father! You must dance the American way, not like a savage!"

With which peremptory command he returned to his room.

Yarak came in at that moment and announced:

"The Russian chief with the big beard has arrived. He's standing out there by his sledge."

Mr. Simons hurried out.

Outside the trading post stood two sledges surrounded by a crowd of hunters.

"Ah, Mr. Los! The Governor!" Simons hailed him from afar, and hurrying forward he shook hands heartily with him and Zhukov.

"Zdrastvuite, zdrastvuite,* Mr. Simons! Haven't seen you a long time—ever since last summer," said Los.

* How do you do (Russian).—*Trans.*

"Please come into the house. Make your own arrangements about fixing up the dogs—you'll do it better than I can."

"I'll see to the dogs," said Yarak.

"See that they're fed well," Andrei told him.

"I will feed them very well!"

The American's wooden house looked a solid enough building, though obviously not made to last. The rooms were clean, cosy and airy with brand-new comfortable furniture. By the bedside lay the skin of a grizzly bear, while the white skin of a polar bear was thrown over the back of an armchair. The white bearskin was a gift from Mr. Thompson. On the writing desk Zhukov saw a pile of American magazines and he was soon deeply immersed in them.

Los paced up and down the room which he examined from floor to ceiling. Tapping the wall he enquired ironically:

"Warm?"

"Very warm, Mr. Los!"

"Smart fellows, you Americans! Rig up a house that will last three years—exactly the term of your agreement—not a day more or less. When the agreement runs out the house will fall to pieces."

"Oh no, it won't, Mr. Los—it's a good strong house. This house will stand for twenty years!"

"Twenty? Would you like to see me push the wall in with my shoulder? We don't build like that in Russia."

"You could knock an elephant over, Mr. Los! But the house is all right—double inch boards, walls lined with cardboard and papered...."

While he was talking Mr. Simons had lit the stove, sliced some bacon, put out the butter and laid the table amid a clatter of knives, forks and plates. He was very deft with his hands.

"Under the terms of the agreement the North Company was to build schools and hospitals besides business premises," Los said, speaking to himself as it were. "I wonder if they're going to be built of boards too?"

Mr. Simons stopped in the middle of the room with a plate in his hand.

"But, Mr. Los, you know that the *Beachaimo* was stowed with trading post buildings and commercial cargo. True, our firm owns a big fleet and they could have sent another steamer, but this is their first experience in Arctic navigation. A trial voyage. The North Company's a firm of good standing, Mr. Los, and I'm sure that next year will see those buildings stipulated in the agreement standing on the coast... Please, sit down!" Simons concluded with a gesture of invitation.

The Revcom men after a bite and a chat on trading affairs were conducted by Mr. Simons into the store.

Here Los examined the neatly packed cartridges and the Winchesters, sniffed the aromatic tobaccos and admired the fine ladies' underwear. Plug tobacco was wrapped up in tinfoil and waxed paper like bars of chocolate. Los was struck by the lavish selection of hardware and ironware and the varied assortment of textile goods.

Mr. Simons drew Los' attention to two papers hanging on the wall.

"Here are our price lists, Mr. Los! This one is for furs, the other for trade goods."

Los went up to the wall and began reading aloud:

"Brick tea... but where's the price?" he asked.

"Oh, the edge of that sheet is torn," said Mr. Simons, and he swiftly pulled out a portable typewriter with Rus-

sian type, placed it on the counter and typed out the missing figures. The price list read:

Brick tea	1 ruble
Winchester	80 rubles
Cartridges, 20	2 rubles
Flour, 40 lbs	7 rubles

The list was a long one and it took Los some time to go through it.

"Very good! And this one's for furs?" he said.

White fox, 1st grade . . .	40 rubles
White fox, 2 nd grade . .	32 rubles
Blue fox, 1st grade . . .	80 rubles
Seal, each	1 ruble

Los studied the price list to the end, went over to the counter and sat down on a package of brick tea. The North Company's representative keenly followed his every movement.

"It's all very good, but useless," said Los with a sigh. "There isn't a single hunter who can read or write. Who are these price lists intended for?"

Simons shrugged and spread his hands.

Yarak came into the store followed by five hunters.

"Not now, not now! Clear out!" said Mr. Simons in Russian, waving them back to the door.

"That's all right, Mr. Simons, they're not in the way," said Zhukov.

"What they need, Mr. Simons, is a live price list, not a dead one," said Los.

"I don't follow you."

"Let's take this package of brick tea—80 bricks. It costs 80 rubles. Now lay two white foxes on it at 40 rubles each. Or the Winchester—place two white pelts under that too. A package of twenty cartridges on two

sealskins—they cost a ruble each and the cartridges cost 2 rubles. That'll be clear even to an illiterate hunter."

The hunters for some reason don't bring any fox pelts, Mr. Los. I haven't traded more than a couple of dozen. With what are we going to make such an illustrated price list?"

"Quite enough. Let's have them here!"

Los threw off his parka and began breaking open cases and ripping open packages of tea, and soon the whole side wall of the store was transformed into a peculiar form of combined showcase and price list. Zhukov explained to the hunters that they could get forty bricks of tea for one white fox. The hunters were dumbfounded—whoever heard of such a thing?

"Kakomei, kakomei!" they cried in amazement.

The hunters rushed off to their yarangs, unearthed pelts which had lain hidden until such time as the trading man would be in a good trading mood, and brought them into the store.

One of the hunters handed Los two white fox skins and said:

"Can I have a Winchester for them?"

"Of course you can," Zhukov answered for him. "But Los is not a trading man. He has only given orders that trade should be carried on in this way. Give the pelts to him," and he pointed to Simons.

Mr. Simons took the pelts in his hands, examined them, shook them out and said:

"Very good skins. What does he want?" On being told he took down a 30×30 calibre Winchester and handed it to the hunter.

The latter took it irresolutely, gazed round at everybody and asked:

"Do I still owe anything for this rifle? Won't I be asked to pay more fox pelts for it later on?"

"No, it's fully paid for. Don't you see how it's shown

there on the wall?" And Zhukov explained the new price list once more.

The store began to do a roaring trade. Hunters came running out of their yarangs with fox skins to be bartered in the new way. The news flew to every dwelling and spread like wildfire up and down the coast.

"Do you see, Mr. Simons? And you thought that the trapping season had not begun. You wait, I'll ride up the coast—you'll be flooded with pelts. It's all very simple. No one has ever traded with them fairly, the way you intend to do," said Los, and there was a tinge of irony in his tone.

"I'm greatly obliged to you, Mr. Los! You'll be a great help to me in organizing trade here."

After spending the day in the store of the trading post the Revcom men went back to Mr. Simons' room.

"This is a barbarous way of trading, Mr. Los, say what you like!" said Simons.

"That's true. But you wait until we get schools up here and teach the people to read and write—it'll be an entirely different kind of trade then. We'll introduce money and put an end to this barter system. But for the present . . . we've got to adapt ourselves to conditions. We Bolsheviks are practical people . . . Hello! What's this I see here—Russian records?" Los exclaimed suddenly.

"They're American records, Mr. Los, but sung in Russian and Ukrainian," observed Mr. Simons deferentially.

Los gave himself up to the enjoyment of his native Ukrainian songs to which he sat listening for a long time. They brought back to him the memories of home and made him feel sad.

Los got up and paced the room. He stopped beside Zhukov, who was glancing through an American magazine. One whole page was filled with a striking illustration of an automobile tyre.

"What's this wheel about, Mr. Simons?" asked Los.
"What's the writing say?"

"It gives an interesting story, Mr. Los, about two sweethearts who spent a month in a car riding through wild jungles and underbrush and along stony riverbanks, and after the journey the tyres did not show the slightest signs of wear. They were stronger than ever. Buy Our Tyres!"

Los burst out laughing.

"Well, turn over the next page, Andrei," he said with a chuckle.

The next page carried a picture of ladies' stockings.

"Is there a story here too, Mr. Simons?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Los!"

"What pictures, what paper! And all that propaganda just for the sake of selling a pair of ladies' stockings!" thought Los, remembering the army newspapers which they used to print at the front on brown packing paper.

Mr. Simons put on a new record. A tenor's melodious voice sang wistfully of the memories of life's golden hours. Here in the north, far from the noisy crowds the song struck a sentimental chord even in Los. He stood chewing his beard, his blue eyes half closed.

"That's a fine song! Wonderful thing a gramophone is, when you come to think of it! Well, that'll do. Andrei, send someone for Mr. Thompson," said Los.

Los was wearing a military tunic and a Red Army cloth helmet with a big five-pointed star in front. In that helmet he looked like one of the sturdy heroes of ancient Russian legend.

Charles Thompson came in looking nervous and flustered. He had reason to fear Los.

"Good evening!" he said in a small voice.

"Dobri vecher, dobri vecher,* Mr. Thompson!" Mr. Si-

* Good evening (Russian).—*Trans.*

mons answered him and invited him to take off his outer garments.

"Mr. Thompson," began Los, "I suppose Mr. Simons has told you that all the trade here is now handled by the North Company?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. Thompson anxiously, when Zhukov had translated this to him.

"Yet I've been told that you are still buying furs from the local trappers. Is that correct?"

Charles Thompson was silent for a while under Los' searching gaze.

"Please, Mr. Zhukoff, tell the commissioner that I really did collect forty-three white foxes and three red ones lately, but these were in payment of outstanding debts."

"Mr. Thompson, if I hear of your buying any more furs I shall impose a heavy fine on you," said Los sternly.

Thompson felt as though a load had been taken off his mind. He nodded his head in silence.

"The forty-six pelts which you have unlawfully purchased you will be good enough to deliver to the Revcom office. Give him a receipt for them, Andrei."

Charles Thompson looked greatly relieved. He had come off well.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The team drivers came in the morning. Los asked Mr. Simons to give them tea and, putting on his traveling clothes, he went outside.

A fiery moon rose from behind the mountains, throwing into sharp relief the jagged ridges which looked like silhouettes pasted on the skyline. There was a crisp frost. A deep silence rested on everything around, broken only by the crunching of the snow under the

padded tread of passers-by. The sound reverberated far and wide.

The icebound sea lay beneath a deep blue glacial canopy. Here and there lonely bergs loomed like silent sentinels. Not a sound was heard. Nature in her sternest mood seemed to be guarding this immense peace of the north.

"How quiet it is!" said Los straining his ears to catch the faintest sound.

Somewhere a dog began howling. Others joined their voices and soon the whole pack in the settlement had taken up the dismal chorus. The harrowing sounds made Los shiver. Suddenly the ululation broke off, and then again the thin wail of the song leader could be heard somewhere far away, and once more the chorus was taken up on all sides.

The team drivers ran to the sledges, shouting briskly: "Tagam! Tagam!"*

The dogs dashed off along the snowbound shore. Andrei and his team driver rode in the first sledge, Los in the second. They sat muffled up in their furs with hoods pulled low over their heads, leaving only a slit for the eyes, and consigned their lives into the hands of their drivers.

Los, listening to the crunch of the snow under the running sledge, was thinking: "I won't quit this place until I've changed the face of life in this grim country. Then Natasha can join me out here. She'll work as enthusiastically as that selfless lad Andrei Zhukov."

The dogs raced silent-footed along the rocky shore. The sledge glided smoothly over the flat surface of the snow-covered ice. A dry wind sprang up. Through the fur hood pulled tightly over his head Los caught a faint, oddly vibrating sound.

* Forward.—*Trans.*

"Listen, Los!" shouted the driver. "The cliffs are singing!"

Every ledge and little crag on the overhanging cliff reacted to the impacts of the wind with a quaint little sound of its own, merging into a deep many-toned humming noise. It was the voice of the timeless rocks.

The wind swept a gritty spray down the face of the cliffs and it scattered over the ice with a metallic rustle. This driving blizzard of stone dust stung the face and blinded the eyes. The path of the sledges was strewn with fragments of rock that had broken off the cliff side—the work of incessant winds and the surf.

"Look, Los! That is a new point!" said the talkative driver. "A crag fell here. The noise of it was heard even in Loren. It crashed through the ice. A lot of stunned fish was thrown up. Men carried away sledges full of them."

Los gazed in wonder at the huge crag weighing thousands of tons. It presented a sight of rare beauty. It was as though someone had hewn out and polished a mass of stones but not yet laid them out.

In a gorge by the seashore stood a lone hunter's yarang. It looked forlorn and evoked a feeling of sadness in the onlooker.

"Why does he live here alone?" asked Los.

"He likes it," answered the driver.

At sight of the yarang the dogs ran forward at a spurt, anticipating the end of the journey. The team drivers smoked and chatted a while with the owner of the solitary yarang, then proceeded on their way.

The dogs were reluctant to go on. They gazed at their master with pleading eyes. After trotting on half-heartedly for a dozen or so paces, they suddenly of one accord, as though sensing the crafty design of their leader, swerved sharply and doubled back on their tracks, making for the yarang. The team driver sunk

his gee pole deep into the snow and brought the team to a halt. With a shout of command that brooked no denial the driver turned the dogs' heads in the required direction. Seeing they would not be allowed to spend the night here the dogs ran on obediently.

"Los," said the driver, "the man living in that yar-ang said the sea trail ahead of us is dangerous. A south wind recently broke the ice away from the coast and left only a narrow strip running fast by the cliffs. The other trail, across the hills, is in bad shape. It is heavily snowed under. The dogs will sink into it over their heads and will have to crawl on their stomachs. Shall we follow the coast trail? You are in a hurry, are you not? What say you?"

"You know best.... Decide yourself...." And Los thought to himself: "What advice can I give him?"

"We're going by the coast trail!" the driver shouted to his companion riding behind.

Los sat hunched in his sledge wrapped up in his bulky fur clothes like a bear. He could hardly turn his head.

"Yes," Los was thinking, "the drivers' clothes are much more comfortable and lighter than ours, and probably warmer too. I must make myself a suit like theirs." The drivers wore short, light parkas with snug-fitting fur trousers and short, neat torbazes on their feet. They enjoyed complete freedom of movement. In case of danger they could jump off the sledge in an instant.

The sledge plunged over the pack ice that encumbered the rock-bound coast. Los strained his eyes ahead, clutching the sides of the sledge or gripping the driver, which did not, however, save him from frequent spills. The drivers kept jumping on and off the sledges with an agility that was somewhat out of keeping with their habitual sluggishness. Now and then, the driver failing to pull the sledge aside in time, it would run into an ice pack and pull up with a jerk. The dogs would look

round of one accord, saying to Los with eyes of reproach: "Get off the sledge!"

Shamed into obedience Los would clamber out of the sledge while the driver lifted it free of the ice pack.

The pack ice at last had ended and crevasses began to make their appearance in the ice, running from the cliffs towards the sea across their trail. The sea itself, black and turbid, was dangerously close. The dogs leapt the fissures one pair at a time, the long sledge gliding over the watery gaps and forming a sort of suspended little bridge across the clefts in the ice.

A south wind was blowing over the cliff tops, but here, down below, it swirled as in a chasm and swept down in fierce gusts from the north. The eddies were carried out to sea and set the sea pulsating. The answering surge could be felt under the heaving ice as the sledges passed over it.

But Los was calm. He had full confidence in his driver. Indeed, he had no say in the matter.

Soon the perilous spots had been passed. The dogs swept out onto a broad level stretch and the drivers brought their teams to a halt, lit up their pipes and joked about the past dangers.

"It's wonderful out here, Andrei! Look at the open spaces!"

"Yes, Nikita Sergeyevich, I see you too are falling in love with the country. Why, even your hoary beard has taken on the same colour as the landscape!" laughed Andrei.

The glimmer of dawn broke at noon.

"Andrei, let them ride together on the first sledge and you and I will follow behind. I'll try my hand at driving the dog-team while I'm at it," said Los.

The drivers readily fell in with this suggestion—they were dying to talk about these Russians whom they were driving far into the northernmost parts of their land.

The trail was excellent. The dogs, to Los' chagrin, trotted on without the slightest interference on his part. He even had no excuse to shout at them.

"Nikita Sergeyevich, why shouldn't we start at once organizing the Tribal Soviets?"

"Because, my dear friend, you don't want to remember a good old proverb which says, 'Look before you leap.'"

"But, Nikita Sergeyevich, this Chukotsk realm of ours is so vast that we can spend five years looking it over and never find the time to leap."

"No, Comrade Zhukov, you're wrong! We start taking the leap on our way back, not before. Can't you see that the main point is that we have shown ourselves to them and made their acquaintance and now we must give them a chance to talk it over and digest it. And they've plenty to talk about, let me tell you. D'you think that price list was a joke? No, sir, that was a piece of revolution! That price list will give a nasty jolt to that ginger spider Thompson, and that slyboots Simons and the rascal Alitet and many others. We have now shown the hunters and trappers that their pelts are worth something. They won't take long to grasp it. Don't you worry!"

The dogs ran smoothly and Los, now thoroughly convinced that they could dispense with his guidance, turned his back on them.

"Nikita Sergeyevich, did you take notice of Yarak? An interesting lad. He wasn't very trustful of me at first. 'Those white men are all alike,' he told Aye. Then he became a different man. He even made me a gift of his goggles. I had long talks with him last winter. He worked as hired man for Thompson. And Thompson's daughter—Mary—a real Chukchi girl, has set her heart on Yarak. When Thompson found it out he drove him out of the house. I told Yarak about the Soviet law, and one day he turned up with Mary to register their mar-

riage. A handsome girl, with a graceful figure! Quite, you know...." Andrei made an eloquent gesture.

"Well," said Los, greatly interested.

"But you know I have no certificate forms or any seal. And I don't know the formalities, either."

"Well, what happened?"

"Nothing happened. They went back without registering."

Los pulled up the sledge with a jerk, jumped out and shouted, his rime-covered beard wagging with indignation:

"You're a fathead, Andrei! And what a fathead! What the devil did you need a form for? It may take five years before you get a supply of those forms! Here you have a revolution in social customs shoved right into your pocket and you make a fuss about forms!"

"All right, there's no need to go off the deep end! As if it can't be mended. We'll put it right on our way back," said Andrei.

"Let them come to me. You'll see how I'll fix it up. All that's needed is brains."

The sledge ahead of them was no longer visible. Los whooped at the dogs and they broke into a gallop.

"And what was the name of that other lad at Enmakai you were telling me about?"

"Vaamcho."

"That's right, Vaamcho. That's where Alitet lives, isn't it? We'll stop at Alitet's place when we get there—I'd like to see what sort of a bird he is."

"Now, that's where you're wrong!" said Andrei.

"Why?"

"We shouldn't hobnob with Alitet! On the contrary, we ought to make it a point of snubbing him and showing respect for Vaamcho. It doesn't matter that Vaamcho has a small and dirty yarang."

"You're right there, Andrei. So we're quits!" said Los with a chuckle and digged his friend in the ribs.

The wind had veered and was now blowing from the north, sweeping low over the ground. Night fell.

The leading sledge came to a stop. One of the drivers came up to the Russians and said:

"Andrei, go back to your sledge. There is going to be a blizzard. Look, the moon has put a white shirt on. I must drive this team myself."

Los settled back in the sledge and became lost in thought.

An impassable mass of pack ice barring their path the drivers turned the dogs off the trail and rode towards the hills.

The blizzard broke.

Myriads of snowflakes swirled in the air, forming a dense pall.

Through the howling fury of this eddying sea of snow Los could see nothing of the leading sledge, not even the dogs of his own team. "Well, Los, it seems this is going to be your first real taste of the north," he thought as he pulled his hood down lower.

"Oi, a man must be careful here. A man can be killed!" shouted the driver. "There are cliffs here. Very high ones!"

The blizzard piled up hanging snowdrifts that clung to the edge of the precipices, and woe to him who rode unwittingly over that treacherous ledge. It sometimes happened that men and dogs, having lost their way in a blizzard, hurtled to their death over the precipice and were buried beneath the avalanche of snow.

The team drivers hitched both sledges together and rode on at a careful pace in single line. Now and again they would stop and take counsel.

The dogs stumbled gropingly in the pitch dark. The drivers turned them slightly into the wind where they

thought the trail lay. One of the drivers walked on ahead and continually threw out his gee pole which he held attached to a rope. If the rope "ran out" there instantly followed a warning cry: "Stop!" That meant there was a precipice here, and both drivers went in search of the trail, leaving the sledges waiting behind.

They had been gone for a very long time. The dogs were snowed under. They curled up and went to sleep.

Los frequently consulted his watch.

"It's half an hour already," he said.

"They'll come back all right!" Andrei said confidently, not sure himself whether they would.

"This watch Simons gave me is a handy thing in a blizzard. A luminous dial. Like a wolf's eye. And only costs a dollar. A poor man's watch. Won't go for more than a year. Smart fellows, those Americans!" said Los.

Time seemed to them an eternity as they sat in the sledges waiting for the drivers.

"They certainly are a long time," said Andrei with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Perhaps they've lost us?"

"Shouldn't be surprised!" Andrei stood up in the sledge and began shouting: "Ehe-e-ei! Ehe-e-e-ei!"

But his voice was carried away by the storm.

"Let's shout together, Nikita Sergeyevich!"

"Best thing would be to fire a shot. My driver has a Winchester here."

Los picked up a battered old Winchester that lay in the sledge with bits of walrus thong tied about it to prevent it from falling to pieces. But try as he might he could not get it to shoot.

"This firearm's probably a hundred years old. You've got to know its secret.... That's what comes of listening to your advice. Why the devil didn't I take my revolver?"

"They don't like it when a man goes about with a

revolver, Nikita Sergeyevich. They think—now a rifle is for killing game, but what is a little gun for? For killing men?"

"Nonsense! Now here's when a revolver would have come in handy.... Anyway, what are we going to do if they've lost us?"

"Sit here until the storm blows over."

"And say it lasts five days?"

"It may last ten—makes no difference."

At this moment a shout was suddenly heard in the darkness:

"The trail! Here's the trail!"

The team drivers ran up to the sledges.

"Who the devil says there's a trail here!" cried Los. Yet his spirits soared.

The drivers dragged the dogs out from under the snow. They shook themselves and the sledges went racing down a steep incline.

"Los!" the driver cried gaily. "This is Whale Jaws gorge. Down below is the Enmakai settlement."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Los barely managed to squeeze into old Vaal's little yarang. Stretched out in the polog his body occupied the full length of the apartment.

Alek, the young mistress, thrown into a flutter as she was by this surprising visit, did not forget that tea had to be made. She stepped over Los and filled the kettle with chips of ice.

It was beyond belief that the Russian chief, of whom so many rumours were rife all along the coast, should now be lying here, in this very yarang. Who could have dreamed of such a distinguished person visiting old Vaal's yarang of all places? It was simply amazing! For never had the foot of a Tang stepped over the threshold

of this dwelling. What could it mean? Was it mockery? Or had he simply taken refuge here from the blizzard?

Such were the thoughts that troubled both Alek and old man Vaal. He puttered about the room not knowing what to do. He crawled out into the little passage and came back with a skin in his hands which he held up to the light. In a considerable perturbation he beat the skin out with a reindeer rib and turned to Los, saying:

"Move up a little, I will put this skin under you. It is softer."

But Los did not understand the old man. He delved into his notebook dictionary, but, as luck would have it, could find nothing suitable to the occasion. Then old Vaal began explaining with the help of signs.

"A-ah! I understand! I understand!" said Los good-humouredly and rolled over on his side.

Vaal quickly slipped the skin into place.

Andrei came in and with the unconstraint of custom lay down beside Los.

Not even Andrei's entrance could set old Vaal at his ease. He fussed about and did not know what to do for his guests' further comfort.

"Sit down, old man! Let us talk," said Los.

Andrei began to act the interpreter.

But how could one talk with one's mind all in a whirl. Who could understand why the bearded Russian chief had stopped at Vaal's yarang? Quite nearby was Alitet's yarang which was as spacious as the tundra and as light as under the sun and where there were good sleeping skins and food in abundance. Did not the Russians perhaps wish Vaal harm?

With a face that betrayed nothing of the turmoil his mind was thrown in, the old man took stealthy stock of the Russians and, his eyes meeting those of Los, he thought: "They are kind eyes, like those of a reindeer—not wolf's eyes."

His fears somewhat allayed, the old man began cleaning out his pipe.

"Here, take some of my tobacco, old man!" said Los, handing him a tin of Prince Albert's.

The old man chuckled softly, stole a look at Alek, then at the guests, and reached out for the tin in some confusion. He lit his pipe, then cried:

"Alek, do you see what tobacco Vaal is smoking? A-a-ai! That is the wife of my son Vaamcho," he added, pointing his pipe at her. "He has gone to the neighbours. He will soon be back."

Vaal paused, then turning to Andrei he asked in a whisper:

"Has the Russian chief lost his way in our settlement? Alitet's yarang, you know, is close by. Quite close."

"We know that," answered Andrei. "But the chief said: 'We shall stop at a yarang where good people live. I hear that old man Vaal is a good man. To him we shall go.' The chief himself said that."

The old man nodded approvingly. It rang true. Old Vaal knew his own worth. He drew closer to Los, gripped his forearm and shook it in silent gratitude.

"Alek, the guests have come in from the cold, after a journey. It is time to give them tea," he said in a cheerful bustling tone.

Alek moved up the little table and brought out cups.

"You have few cups, Alek. There is a scarcity of cups in all the yarangs. That is why we always carry ours with us," said Andrei, placing two mugs on the table.

Vaamcho, his face nipped red by the frost, came into the yarang.

"Ah, here's our old friend!" cried Andrei, holding out his hand. "How long is it since we last met? You must have forgotten me, eh?"

"No," muttered Vaamcho gruffly.

He was no less perplexed by the presence of the guests than the old man. But the memory of his first meeting with Andrei made him brighten up. The thought flashed through his mind: "Maybe it is not out of fun they have come to visit me? Last time, too, he did not want to stay with Charlie Red Nose."

"They are good guests, Vaamcho, good guests!" the old man hastened to reassure him, guessing his son's state of mind.

"How is the hunting, Vaamcho?" asked Los, consulting his notebook.

Vaamcho spun round at the sudden question and a smile flitted across his face. Los' Chukchi pronunciation was very amusing.

"This is Los, the chief," explained Andrei.

"There is some hunting. There are some little seals," replied Vaamcho.

"How many white foxes have you trapped?"

"Four. Good foxes! If I took them to the new Meri-can I would get a lot of goods for them. It is said that he does good trading."

"Andrei, ask him why he hasn't sold his pelts yet?"

On being asked Vaamcho shook his head.

"They are not mine," he began. "They have been caught in Alitet's traps. He gave them without payment. And I had to take goods from him without payment. I owe him three skins."

The face of the Russian chief darkened. The old man felt uneasy.

At that moment Alitet himself came into the yarang.

"Good day, Russki chief! Why does Russki chief lie in a little polog? A little polog bad, a big one good. I have room for you in my yarang," purred Alitet, interspersing his speech with Russian words.

Old Vaal listened to this speech in great distress. The

Russians would now get up laughing and leave his yarang.

"My yarang is a good one, a big one," went on Alitet. "Russki soup with salt. Young reindeer meat, much, very much. Ai, very tasty food!"

"No, we are staying with Vaal, and here we remain," said Andrei firmly.

"What do my ears hear?" thought Vaal with a leap of the heart. "It would seem then that the Russians truly believe Vaal to be a worthy person?" and his eyes sought Vaamcho's. Vaamcho, too, felt as though a load had been taken off his mind.

Los watched Alitet's every gesture and almost hung on his lips, closely studying the man. He had heard a good deal about Alitet and his doings, and now, as he watched his shifty ferret eyes and listened to his smooth-tongued fawning speeches his ire began to rise.

"What does he say?" asked Los.

Andrei translated what Alitet had said, whereupon Los scrambled to his feet and said sharply, his beard quivering:

"Tell him that the Russian chief wishes to stay with honest men and not with thieves who steal foxes out of other men's traps."

When this was translated old Vaal drew a quick surprised gasp. "Where had the Russian chief learned this truth?"

"Russki chief is angry chief. Our people like to talk softly. Merican man also speaks softly," replied Alitet.

"I'll have something to say to you tomorrow about your trading with the contraband American schooner. That kind of trade is also theft. D'you get me?"

Alitet's eyes darted about uneasily. He wanted to say something when Los rapped out sternly:

"Kanto!"

The word acted like magic. Alitet disappeared in a flash.

"Well, that's one word that's come in useful," said Los with a smile. "I didn't forget that word, Andrei!"

Vaal said in a whisper:

"Now Alitet will not help Vaal's yarang. He will take the traps away as well."

"That's all right, old man. The Soviet Government will help you. I will help you."

"We don't want Alitet's help!" said Vaamcho angrily.

"Quite right, Vaamcho! I'll appoint you chairman of the Tribal Soviet here and you'll be yourself chief in this settlement."

And they sat in Vaal's yarang till late in the night talking about the Tribal Soviet, about what it meant and what its functions were to be.

Alitet, over supper in his yarang, roundly scolded the Russian chief. Tygrena sat listening and was secretly elated that there appeared to be some Tangs who did not like Alitet. She was curious to see what kind of men they were. The American food remained untouched and Alitet threw it to the dogs.

When Alitet retired to Atteneut's polog, Tygrena's curiosity reached fever pitch. She grew hot with excitement. Thrusting her head out of the polog she lay peering into the dark passage, enjoying the frosty air that cooled her burning face and bare shoulders. Finally making up her mind she slipped on her fur coat and ran off to Vaamcho's yarang.

Tygrena silently poked her head under the skin curtain.

"Come in, come in, Tygrena," cried old Vaal, pleased to see her.

"No, I must run back at once—I have just come to have a look," she said, examining the young Russian lad and the bearded chief.

She would have liked to hear them speaking, but they had fallen silent upon her entry.

"Never mind, I'll hear all about it tomorrow from Alek," thought Tygrena and disappeared.

"That was Alitet's wife. A very good woman," said Vaal.

"Alitet took her against her will. She ran away and he brought her back again," added Vaamcho.

"We must take her under our protection, Nikita Sergeyevich," said Zhukov.

"We shall, Andrei," answered Los.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

During their long tour of inspection up the coast the Revcom men had forgotten the feel of a real bed and the sensation of washing with water instead of snow. Their bodies cried out for water.

Los brought in snow in a bucket and thawed it on the stove. Then he dragged in a baby's bathtub which he had brought back from one of the outlying trading posts. Andrei had been curious about that bathtub during the journey and had asked:

"Why are you lugging that thing about with you. We haven't any babies, have we?"

"That's my secret," Los had answered with a grin.

Now, placing the bathtub next to the washstand, Los said:

"A bath, under our conditions, is a bit of a problem, but not at all impossible. Ingenuity, my dear man, ingenuity's the thing! You've been wondering why I've been dragging this bathtub five hundred kilometres? That tub, my dear fellow, is going to act as our sink and we're going to wash over the washstand. Pity there aren't any birch trees growing around here, otherwise I'd make a switch and have a real Russian steam bath."

The Revcom hut was well heated, Los undressed and, slapping his thighs, said:

"With a little stretch of the imagination we can now believe ourselves to be in a real bath. So here goes."

He poured some water into the bathtub, stepped into it and began washing his head under the washstand. He grunted with satisfaction like a walrus.

"Ugh! I feel a ton easier. . . . Come on, get undressed! I've heated some water for you too. A whole bucketful—enough to wash a bear in."

It was midnight, but the glimmer of the white night streamed relentlessly through the little window and drove away sleep. Refreshed by their bath the two men lay stretched luxuriously on their beds. How little a man needed to make him happy! Just one bucket of water!

"I forgot to mention, Nikita Sergeyevich. After we'd spoken to Alitet about his contraband trade Tygrena followed me out to the door and said: 'Alitet is a bad man.' "

"Yes, I noticed that girl. She struck me as being a person of character. When Vaamcho comes down to the Revcom we'll have to put him wise. We'll call Tygrena out and have a chat with her. Well, Mr. Zhukoff, what do you say to a smoke of Capstan before we turn in!"

"Okay, Mr. Los. Governor general!"

They laughed, remembering the Americans, and lit up.

"We'll fetch teachers over and medical men," said Los, weaving dreams of the future. "We'll have our own people at the trading stations—that's when we'll get things going. The American trading stations are all right as far as they go, but all they know is business. We want the trading stations to perform a cultural mission, explain things to the people and not merely barter tobacco for furs. We'll have to get rid of 'em and set up our own trading stations."

"But the North Company's got an agreement for three years!"

Los propped himself up on his pillow and growled:

"And what about the school buildings and the hospitals—have they brought them over? Eh?"

"Yes, but we've got no say in this matter, Nikita Sergeyevich. The Narkomvneshtorg* does all the dealings with this company."

"What of it? What are you and I here—dummies? Of course I'm not going to send 'em packing tomorrow.... But I can raise the question, can't I? What's to prevent me sending in a report to the Gubernia Revcom and laying all the facts before them?"

"I suppose so."

"Ah, there you are! We'll 'mail' our report about this tomorrow first thing."

"And what are we going to do about the contraband traffic? Did you see the pledge Alitet got from Taki Black Beetle? It's these smugglers who are fleecing the people, and making away with the furs."

"We'll set up coast guard posts, get men over specially for them. That's another thing for tomorrow's 'mail.' Well, that'll do! Let's get some sleep!" And Los turned over on his side.

It grew quite light in the Revcom hut. The sun had no sooner set than it began climbing the sky again. Andrei could not fall asleep. He got up and went to the window. There was not a soul without.

Andrei shook Los out of his sleep.

"I was thinking it would be a good idea to organize a culture centre here. You know, various kinds of educational services...."

Los raised himself on his elbow, and glaring at Andrei, snapped:

"Who the devil's interested in your nocturnal phantasies? Has the enemy shown up that you have to wake me? A fellow can't go to sleep peacefully after his bath!

* People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade.—*Trans.*

First it was the blessed light kept me awake, now it's you. Isn't tomorrow good enough? Hang something over the window and go to sleep!"

Los pulled the blanket angrily over his head.

"I thought you weren't sleeping too," said Andrei and hung a jacket over the window. But the light still penetrated. Andrei lay down and quickly fell asleep.

"Now I can't sleep," said Los looking at his sleeping companion. He picked up his tall fur boot and took a well-aimed blow with it at Andrei.

"Andrei! Andryusha! What was it you wanted to tell me so urgently?" he cried, and there was a hint of buried laughter in his voice.

Andrei rubbed his eyes sleepily, yawned, stared at Los sitting up in bed, then broke into a laugh. He swung himself out of bed, stretched his arms and yawned again.

"I wanted to tell you about the culture centre, Nikita Sergeyevich. One that would include a hospital, and a boarding school, and a vet service for treating and breeding good dogs, and a politico-educational service and a bathhouse. A real bathhouse like they have on the 'mainland,' not like our washstand arrangement. And, of course, a bakery. The people here have never tasted bread and there's nowhere to bake it."

It was decided to submit this proposal, too, for the consideration of the Gubernia Revcom. The letter box received another bulky package into its capacious interior.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ever new parties of hunters and trappers kept arriving at the trading post daily. Mr. Simons was busy in his store from morning till night. The work tired him out and, on Mr. Thompson's advice, he sometimes suspended business.

"That's all right, they don't mind waiting even for two or three days. They enjoy living here and are in no hurry to get home," Mr. Thompson had said, thinking the while to himself: "These johnnies have gone clean crazy! Where the dickens have they got all those furs from? I thought Alitet had collected them all. A hundred and twenty white foxes in a single day! I never heard of such a thing!"

One morning Yarak said to Mr. Simons:

"I cannot help you do the trading today. I have a headache and feel giddy. Let Charlie be your interpreter. He speaks our language well."

Mr. Thompson gladly accepted Mr. Simons' proposal. But he soon regretted having come to the trading post. A roaring trade was being done. The trappers were in high spirits and they received so much merchandise that their sledges were loaded high with it.

"See, Charlie, how the new Merican trades with us! He is always in good spirits and we no longer take our pelts back with us. You never did such a trade with us," said a jovial young trapper.

"What does he say, Thompson?" asked Mr. Simons.

"He says he has a long way to go," muttered Mr. Thompson. "You're far too generous with him, Simons. You could pay him much less and he'd be just as delighted."

"I couldn't do that, Thompson—not with Los around. He has a copy of our price lists and if he finds out that we're not giving full value he'll be down on our firm like a ton of bricks. The thing's got to be handled with subtlety," said Mr. Simons with a grin.

Mr. Thompson went home feeling pretty blue. He entered the house quietly and was on the point of going into his room when he suddenly stopped and pricked up his ears. Then, with a swift movement, he tore down the fur curtain of the apartment in which his family lived. Mary was there alone with Yarak.

Charles Thompson saw red. Choking with rage he rushed at Yarak with clenched fists.

Yarak seized him by the wrists and held them in a grip of steel. In the same instant he caught the flash of a hunter's knife in Mary's hand.

"Drop that, Mary!" shouted Yarak "Go away!"

Mary hesitated.

"Quick, get out of here!" shouted Yarak angrily, and Mary disappeared.

"You scoundrel, you deceiver! What did you come here for!" spluttered Charlie.

Gripping Charlie's wrists Yarak looked him squarely in the eye and said coolly:

"The Russki chief said I could come. . . . Said I could marry. It is the Russki law. . . ."

"God damn you!" roared Charles Thompson and suddenly bit Yarak's hand.

Yarak flung him aside, sending him sprawling against the wall. He ran out into the passage, seized Mary by the hand and made off with her down the street.

Charles Thompson lay for a long time on the skins, then mopped his face with a coloured handkerchief and went out. Running into Rultyna he shrieked:

"You hellhag, you! Where are the children? What have you done with them, you damn hawd! These filthy goings on are of your doing! You wait, see what I'll do tomorrow!"

Rultyna said nothing.

Mr. Thompson strode into his room and slammed the door.

"Charlie is cross. Charlie is very cross!" thought Rultyna and went to call the children to put them to bed.

There was no trace of Mary in the settlement. Neither was there of Yarak.

Rultyna wandered all over the settlement in search of her daughter. She looked into every yarang.

"They went down that trail," said a boy whom she accosted. "They must have passed that hill by now."

"Good. Let them go," she said.

Rultyna returned home and peeped into Charlie's room. He was lying on his bed, fully dressed. Rultyna went in and called him. Charlie was asleep.

Rultyna snatched the dog harness from off the wall and ran outside. In a twinkling she had twelve dogs harnessed to the sledge and drove off in the direction of the hill. She shouted at the dogs and hit the sledge with the gee pole, urging the team on faster and faster.

Soon Rultyna caught sight of the fugitives.

But Yarak and Mary suddenly swerved from the trail and ran swiftly towards the stony slope.

The old woman stood up in the sledge and balancing herself with difficulty cried out at the top of her voice:

"Yara-a-ak! It's Ru-u-ultyna!"

Her feeble voice was lost amid the vast tundra. Yarak and Mary ran so fast that the dogs could barely overtake them. Rultyna turned the team off the trail and headed it for their tracks. She stood in the sledge all the time shouting and calling Yarak and Mary.

Yarak knew that the sledge would have difficulty in riding over the hillside which was strewn with fragments of rocks and stones. They would yet have time to escape!

Gasping for breath they crawled into a cave.

"If Charlie gets off the sledge to search for us you go after him and kill him with a stone," said Mary.

The dog-team dashed up to the foot of the hill and came to a dead stop as the sledge was caught amid the stones.

"Mary! It's I, Rultyna! Fear not!" the runaways suddenly heard.

"Mary! Come out!" cried Yarak joyfully.

The old woman sat hunched in the sledge, too weak and spent to utter a word. Mary flung her arms around her.

Rultyna, overcome with emotion, said:

"Take this dog-team. Go away at once into the tundra, go to the hills and live with my brother Haimelkot."

"Rultyna, come with us," said Yarak, deeply moved.

"No, I cannot. I have many children waiting for me at home. I shall return home and be as silent as these stones."

"Rultyna, we shall call on the bearded Russian chief. Andrei told me that the bearded one wants to give us a marriage paper," said Yarak.

"Good. Go to the bearded one. Maybe the Russian will understand that Mary needs a husband," and she heaved a sigh.

Yarak took the gee pole out of Rultyna's hands and called sharply to the dogs, whom he had bred and nurtured. The latter, recognizing their master's voice, lowered their tails and set off at a merry pace.

"Tagam! Tagam!" Rultyna cried out after them. She stood for a long time gazing at the retreating sledge.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Mr. Thompson awoke at an unusually early hour. This was the first time in his life that he had slept in his clothes.

Blinking at the glaring sunshine that streamed into his room through the uncurtained window Mr. Thompson drew a deep sigh, shook his head and frowned. His glance wandered to the alarm clock, but that patented timepiece had stopped. **"What's happening in this house?" thought Charles Thompson.**

He took a turn in the room, and glancing through the window noticed that his sledge was missing from the place in which it usually stood. A sudden foreboding seized him. Throwing a fur jacket over his shoulders he hurried out and ran round the house, but there was not a sign of either sledge or dogs anywhere. Thompson rushed into the passage breathless and agitated, and stopping before his family's apartment demanded grimly:

"Where is Mary?"

There was no reply.

He flung open the door of his room and saw Rultyna there clearing the table.

"Where are the dogs?" he shouted.

Rultyna hung her head in silence, waiting meekly for her white husband to say: "Get out!"

Charles Thompson pushed her roughly and she dropped the crockery on the floor, smashing a cup.

Breathing heavily Thompson came running to Rynteu's yarang.

"Get me some dogs, quick!"

Rynteu, clad only in his fur stocking with a parka thrown over his shoulders, stood debating with himself: "I must not give him the dogs, and yet I must." He said imperturbably:

"The dogs are running about the settlement, Charlie."

"Get the dogs quick, you fool-man!"

"But, Charlie, what dogs in the settlement can be found to overtake yours? Yours are good dogs, e-e-eh, very good dogs! Only Alitet's can compare with them. You had better wait—maybe Alitet will turn up."

"What drivel are you jabbering, you old devil! I must go at once, this very minute! Get the dogs harnessed, look sharp!"

Charles Thompson shook him by the dangling sleeve of his parka and Rynteu went unhurriedly into his

yarang. He reappeared carrying a bundle of dogs' harness which he held up to Charlie's nose, saying:

"Only the harness is trashy! It needs mending."

"Let's have what you've got!" snarled Mr. Thompson.

Rynteu went off whistling in search of his none too spirited dogs. He sauntered back in due course with the pack at his heels. They came eagerly enough, labouring under the delusion that they were going to be fed.

Rynteu, with maddening leisureliness, set about harnessing them, muttering the while:

"What sense is there in trying to overtake them on these marmots? It is like a lame old man attempting to catch a wild reindeer!"

Rynteu contrived to harness in the lead a dog who had a bad foot and did not understand the commands.

Charles Thompson took his seat in the sledge and drove off. He counted on overtaking the runaways at the next settlement. He failed, however, to make allowance for his dogs. He shouted at them and threw his gee pole at them, but they merely whined plaintively and kept looking back at him without quickening their pace. Finally they stopped and would budge no further.

Charles Thompson sat in the sledge, despair written all over his face.

"It's useless," he thought, and turned the dogs back. They immediately set off at a brisk canter with tails erect and ears pricked up.

Mr. Thompson, exhausted by impotent rage, went to the trading post.

Mr. Simons met him with a cheery "Good morning, Thompson!"

"May be a good morning, but not for me," said Mr. Thompson morosely. "What the devil's come over these heathens, Simons—perhaps you can tell me? It's unbelievable! Take that fellow Rynteu, who's been dependent on me these last twenty years and was as devoted as a

dog—even he has started acting funny. It was all I could do to make him give me a dog-team. And when the dirty beggar did round the mongrels up, you should have seen what a collection of wrecks they were! Mind you, Simons, a year ago my single word, just one word, was enough to have the finest team in the settlement got ready in a trice. I can't make head or tail of what's going on," concluded Mr. Thompson with a helpless gesture.

"What's the matter, Thompson?"

Upon hearing the story of Mary's elopement with Yarak Mr. Simons sighed in sympathy and shook his head regretfully.

"There's nothing for it, Thompson. Take my advice and shake the dust of this darned country off your feet. You don't want to have your corpse thrown out on the rocks as carrion for the wild beasts, the way you told me the custom is here, do you? D'you mean to say with the money you've got you wouldn't like to spend the rest of your days in a civilized country? You haven't had the taste of fresh milk in your mouth for twenty years. It's too awful for words, Thompson! That girl of yours, too, is as much a savage as the rest of 'em. Don't take offence, Thompson—I'm being frank with you. Really, I'm very sorry for you!"

"Oh, that's all right. You're a good guy, Simons. I haven't had anyone speak to me in such a friendly way before. . . . I say, Simons, what about my going with you to Canada? I'm all alone now."

"I'd simply be delighted, Thompson! We'd make a go of it together, I'm sure!"

A long silence ensued in which the two men sat absorbed in thoughts of their future life together in Canada.

"Coming back to our conversation, Thompson—you're worried about your daughter, aren't you? My

dear fellow, that girl was born here. She'd hate America and Canada as heartily as I hate this godforsaken land of ice. She'd pine for these here wild rocks, their filthy yarangs, their walrus meat and these howling blizzards. Yarak's just the kind of husband she needs. I'm sure she'll be happy with him in a way...."

"I'll take Ben with me.... And I'll see if I can't get Mary back. I believe she'd get used to it in Canada in time—what do you think, Simons?"

"Possibly, possibly," said Mr. Simons half-heartedly.

"But what shall I do with the furs? I've got over fifteen hundred pelts. They won't let me take them out with me. And I can't say I'm keen on going all the way to Petropavlovsk to sell them. Los wanted to take them over on the spot, but luckily he didn't have the money."

"May I give you a piece of friendly advice, Thompson?"

"What's that, Simons?" queried Mr. Thompson, all ears.

"As a matter of fact it isn't so much advice as a simple lesson in geography. Now Nome on Alaska is no farther off than the nearest Chukchi settlement. That's one thing. Secondly, the Bering Strait is not so terribly wide, Thompson!" Mr. Simons smiled significantly. "If I had to I could cross it in a row-boat. You only need to give the boat hunters a packet of Kentucky to be in America within a few hours with all your belongings. You can wait for me in Alaska or at 'Frisco and we can embark together from there for Canada."

"And what about the house? I wanted to sell the house and the store."

"My dear Thompson! Who on earth would want to buy that old packing case of a house? Besides, if you start looking for a buyer you'll rouse suspicion. Mr. Los will smell a rat at once. If I were you I'd ask Mr. Los

to allow me to stay on here and spend my last years in the bosom of my family. And when the coast's clear you can load your stuff on a boat and beat it!"

"You're quite right, Simons. You have real American business brains."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The long northern winter was over. The snowdrifts had become loose and soggy. They seemed to be sinking into the earth, dwindling from day to day. The bounds between night and day had almost vanished, and the long, sunny days slipped swiftly by.

An argument unexpectedly sprang up between the two Revcom men. They had lost a day. How it had happened neither of them could say. According to Los it was April 20, according to Zhukov April 21.

Each warmly stood up for his particular date, citing in support a mass of documentary evidence. They went back over the train of events, recalling the various stages of their recent long journey, but all to no purpose—the dates would not tally. And there was not a single Soviet citizen in the region who could settle the point for them.

"All the same you're wrong, Nikita Sergeyevich! You'll see, you'll be celebrating the First of May a day earlier."

"All right, then. We'll celebrate my date first and then yours and make a double holiday of it."

Zhukov's pupils came into the Revcom. They took off their outer fur garments, remaining in the gingham shirts which Los himself had cut out for them. They sat down to their lesson, carefully writing out the letters of the Russian alphabet and pronouncing words and phrases. Their greatest difficulty was the letter D which they pronounced as T, saying Tog instead of Dog and Tuck instead of Duck.

The children were eager pupils and the long lesson did not bore them. When it was over Los emerged from behind the curtain with a box of dominoes.

"Well, kids, what about a game?"

"Yes, yes, a game, Los!" they sang in chorus.

The children, like the grownups, did not call the Revcom commissioner by his name and patronymic as was the custom in Russia. It was too long and unintelligible. They had no surnames and patronymics themselves.

Los, with a flourish, was about to lay down his last piece, when a little tot slipped his own domino into the place and shouted gleefully:

"Wait, Los! I have finished!"

"Los has lost the game, Los has lost the game!" cried the children, clapping their hands, while Los frowned, looking as though he were genuinely annoyed.

Knowing that Los could not be induced to play more than one game the children slipped quickly into their little parkas and scampered away.

One of them, pausing in the doorway, threw back:

"Los, old man Umkatagen is going to die tonight." The boy drew a finger across his throat.

"Here, wait a minute! What's that you said?"

"Tonight old Umkatagen is going to be strangled. Everything is ready for it," the boy explained calmly.

Los pulled the boy down to a seat by the table and asked very quietly, almost in a whisper:

"To be strangled, you say? What for?..."

The boy threw an anxious glance around him, obviously weighing in his mind whether he ought to talk about such things or not.

"He is a very sick old man.... His leg is spoilt. The shamans tried to cure him, but it was no good. Ermen, Umkatagen's son, has lost all his dogs—some he

sacrificed to the spirits, some he gave to the shamans. He used up all his dogs but the illness can't be driven out. A very wicked spirit must be living in his leg. And so Umkatagen is going to the people of the Upper World. He is going tonight. All the folks are glad. Ermen too is very glad."

"You run off to Ermen right away and tell him: 'Los forbids the old man to be strangled!' Do you understand? You mustn't strangle people! Run along, I'll soon be there myself!" said Los in great agitation, hastily putting on his torbazes.

The boy ran off.

"Wait a minute, Nikita Sergeyevich, there's plenty of time till tonight. Let's better talk the thing over," said Zhukov.

"There's nothing to talk over! I won't have the man strangled!" cried Los.

"You can't prevent these things by administrative measures, Nikita Sergeyevich. It's useless. They'll all agree with you, but as soon as your back is turned they'll strangle him. Don't forget that the old man has given his 'word.' To retract it, according to their customs, is unworthy of a man."

"What do you suggest then—letting the old man be strangled? Make yourself clear!" snapped Los, pulling on his skin boots.

"You're excited, Nikita Sergeyevich, and don't want to understand me. I don't think we can break down such walls in a single year! I'm damned if I know what to suggest...."

"But I do! What the deuce have we come here for? Who are we—representatives of the Soviet Government, or what?" exploded Los, struggling with his boots. "Aren't we followers of Lenin?"

"Yes, but Lenin also wrote that custom and superstitious survivals are the hardest thing to deal with!

The war against them must be a laborious, systematic campaign based on a great power of conviction...."

"That's enough! I don't need any lectures!" shouted Los with a downward hacking motion of the hand and began nervously pacing the room in silence.

Ermen came running into the Revcom.

"Los," he began excitedly, "the old man must be strangled. The old man himself has asked to be strangled. I cannot refuse his last request. There will be great misfortune...."

"There won't be any misfortune. Live people are not strangled. Your father Umkatagen is not your enemy," said Los.

"No, and I would not think of strangling an enemy. I love Umkatagen and want to do him good—to carry out his last wish. No man of our people has ever taken his 'word' back. And you, Los, want to make my father a bad man, the worst of men."

"There's a problem for you, dammit!" muttered Los under his breath.

At this point Andrei interposed:

"You know, Ermen, that we have a new law, and it forbids a man to be strangled. If not this law we would not say anything."

"The old man must be strangled. It will be very bad if the old man is not strangled," persisted Ermen doggedly.

Los stood by the window, meditatively chewing his beard. Suddenly he spun round, went up to Ermen and said severely:

"I forbid you to strangle Umkatagen! If I hear that the old man has been strangled you will be punished. I will send you away from the Chukotsk land as soon as a ship comes. And when you die in a strange land none of your people will hear your voice before you die...."

Los' voice was agitated and sharp.

Ermen heard the Russian chief out in attentive silence, then said:

"Los, you are the first Tang who our people call a real man. It is only the first winter since you have come to our land, and trade is entirely different already. Our people now drink their tea with sugar. Men have rifles who never had them before, men have traps who went without them. Everywhere the people say: 'The Bearded One loves our foxes and has made them worth many goods.' The people say that you are like a good shaman, a kind shaman, you help us to live. That is what people say along the coast. But now you talk of things which my ears cannot understand. Have the bad shamans spoiled you? You are not the same! Why do you say that Umkatagen's last wish must not be granted? Umkatagen is a good old man."

Ermen too was agitated, but he spoke quietly, almost in a whisper. Beads of sweat stood out on his face.

"Ermen, let us sit down on the bench, closer to each other," said Los in a calmer, controlled voice.

Ermen sat down, looking somewhat startled.

"Now, listen to what I am going to tell you. Listen well. Umkatagen is not such a very old man. I know him. Last autumn he was still steering a boat during the whale hunting. A ship will come and the Russian doctor will cure Umkatagen's leg. I am telling you the truth. I shall order the trading men to bring engines for the boats which will drive them without oars. They will sail as fast as a schooner. And I want Umkatagen's eyes to see this new life. I tell you the truth! You said yourself that life has changed a little already. Do you understand what I say?"

"Yes, I understand," said Ermen.

"There is a wise man on the Mainland—his name is Lenin," put in Andrei. "It is he who has pointed the

way to the new life. The old law, the law of Charlie Red Nose and Alitet has been thrown out and destroyed. A new law has been made which helps people to live.

"And that new law forbids you to kill old people," went on Los. "They should be cared for and properly looked after and their lives made easier. Go home, Ermen, and tell the old man that Los does not want old Umkatagen to die. Tell him that I wish to have a talk with him. . . ."

Ermen heaved a deep sigh and said:

"I don't know."

He picked up his cap and went home.

Los paced the room, throwing an occasional glance out of the window.

"Well, Andrei, d'you think we've convinced him?"

"No. You believe the liquidation of old survivals is an easy process? You imagine that you can transfer them plump into socialist society? No, Nikita Sergeyevich, we'll have to put in a good deal of work yet. And jolly hard work! It's going to be a difficult job that will need delicate handling."

"You're too young to be teaching me yet!" cried Los. "I prefer to take the bull by the horns!"

"They'll strangle him," he heard Zhukov's voice behind him.

"Then get dressed and let's go to the yarang at once!" said Los with sudden determination. "And I shan't leave the place until I've had my way."

A lad stood by the entrance, barring the way. He said in a whisper:

"You cannot go in. Tomorrow you may come."

Los thrust him aside, and bending low he dived into the polog.

"Stop!" he cried, seeing that Ermen had placed the noose over his father's head. "What are you doing?"

He tore the thong out of Ermen's hand and crawling

on his hands and knees over the skins he removed the noose from the condemned man's neck.

"Tell them, Andrei—you speak better than I do—that the evil spirit will not blame the old man or Ermen or the others. Let it wreak its vengeance on me, for it was I who prevented the old man from being strangled."

Andrei translated, and the people stared at one another in blank consternation. There was a look of sheer terror in their eyes. Even the shaman cowered terrified in a corner whence he glared at the Russians with a look of hate. No one dared open his mouth. Suddenly the old man raised himself on the skins on which he had been lying prostrate and said in a muffled voice:

"Why have you come here? Or has anyone called you? Go hence from here, you man who has lost his mind."

Los smiled good-naturedly and drew his pipe and tobacco out of his pocket.

"Let's have a smoke, old man!" he said, proffering his pouch.

The old man turned his back on Los in silence.

"Come, Umkatagen, let us smoke! I give you a present of my pipe." And Los placed the pipe in the old man's hand.

A painful smile crept into the old man's face.

"The Russian chief is like a child," he said, holding the pipe out to be filled.

Los filled it for him, rolled himself a cigarette and held out a lighted match. They puffed away in silence.

"What now?" asked Umkatagen of the shaman. The emotional strain and his terror of the evil spirit proved too much for the old man and he began to weep softly. He smoked, while the tears rolled slowly down his grief-stricken face.

The whole thing was so unprecedented that the sha-

man himself was utterly bewildered. Finding his voice at last he hissed from out his corner:

"The old man's name must be changed at once, so that Kele will not know him. We must cover up the tracks."

"What name shall I take?" said Umkatagen, thinking furiously.

"Take a Russian name, old man," said Andrei. "Then Kele will lose track of you altogether."

"Yes, yes, that is right! Kele will not seek a Russian," chimed in the shaman.

"What is the name of that Russian who has invented the new law of life?" asked Ermen, turning to Los.

"Lenin! Ilyich!"

"Let the old man take himself that name," said Ermen.

The choice of a new name brooked no delay. The old man was forthwith christened Ilyich.

"Well, have you taken a name?" demanded the shaman.

"I have, I have!" answered the old man quickly.

The name was there and then put to the test.

"Umkatagen!" cried Ermen.

"Umkatagen!" shouted the shaman.

The old man was silent.

"Ilyich!" called Ermen.

"Voil!" responded ex-Umkatagen with alacrity.

"Umkatagen! Ilyich! Umkatagen! Ilyich!" came calls from all sides.

And every time the name of Umkatagen was uttered a deep silence reigned in the yarang, and as soon as anyone uttered the name Ilyich the old man started and responded quickly.

"Well, Ilyich, now let's have another smoke," cried Los gaily.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Los woke up early. Andrei was not in the room.

"Gone off hunting again. Ah well, let him enjoy himself," thought Los with a touch of paternal affection.

Friendship is hard to preserve between men who are thrown together for a long time in each other's company, sharing a crowded little room, knowing each other's good and bad points and having heard each other's life story related times beyond number. But Los and Andrei were true friends.

Los lit the stove, heated a tin of meat for breakfast, drank his tea and sat down to work. Sitting at his writing desk he suddenly felt a twinge of pain in his legs. Upon examining them he found them to be slightly swollen.

"I wonder whether scurvy is not living in my legs?" he thought in Chukchi.

Going up to the mirror he closely examined his gums. They too were slightly swollen.

"Nonsense!" said Los and resumed his labours.

He had seldom taken the air of late, being busy the last few days in writing up his report to the Gubernia Revcom. The report was a voluminous one.

"Who the devil would have thought I'd become a writer!" he mused, eyeing the pile of written sheets with a twinkle of amusement.

Evening came, but Zhukov had not yet returned from the hunting.

"I hope the ice doesn't break away and send him drifting the ocean on an ice floe." The thought worried Los and he went outside to have a look at the sea.

The sea was a dead calm. The ice fields stretched away as far as the eye could reach. The sea was safe enough. Catching sight of old Komo, Los walked over to him.

Komo was sitting on the skeleton of a whale, smok-

ing a long brass pipe. He was a very ancient man. He had never known what it was to be ill in all his long life, and only senility now kept him chained to his yarang.

"Well, how is life, Komo?" asked Los.

"Very good. All our hunters are out there," said Komo, pointing his pipe seawards. "The hunting is good now. There are many seals, sometimes sea lions. Your youth is also there."

"Is it not dangerous to go so far out among the ice?"

"No, it is not dangerous now." The old man squinted at the clear sky and added: "There will be no wind for five days."

"That's good, Komo. Now I'll go back to work," said Los greatly relieved.

"What kind of work can a man do in a hut?" thought Komo. Aloud he said:

"Go then, go!"

Los made out the program for the May First celebrations.

"I'll write my speech out, learn it by heart and shoot it off in Chukchi," he decided.

He sat for a long time writing the notes for his speech, but he made little progress.

"Now the May Day secret meetings of the workers under tsarism—what do they know of them?" he mused. "And the fight against the autocracy? The only kind of fight they know is wrestling, man to man. How explain it to them? A pretty problem!"

He sat on writing till late in the night. One after another his speeches found their way into the stove, and as he watched them burning and turning into ashes, Los thought: "You can make a speech that way too. Spin a long yarn and see all your efforts turned to ashes." And tugging at his beard he bent anew over the table.

Before going to sleep he went out and had another look at the ice fields. The sea was calm.

In the night Los was awakened by a loud knocking at the door. Hastily slipping into his clothes he opened the door slightly and peered out. He saw a tall man and a woman. The latter's cast of features was not Chukchi.

"Russki chief, help us now. Help us quick, quick!" said the man excitedly.

"Where do you come from?"

"We are Yarak and Mary."

"O-oh, Yarak!" cried Los drawing him into the room. "Come in, sit down! We'll make some tea. Do you know how to use a primus stove, Yarak?"

"Yes, I do," answered Yarak proudly.

Yarak and Los got busy with the tea. Mary sat watching Los in silence. The powerful hands of the Russian bearded chief fascinated her.

They had just sat down to have their tea when Andrei burst into the room.

"Hello, what's this, a wedding? How are you, Yarak! How do you do, Mary! I killed four seals!" he cried all in one breath.

"Kakomei!" cried Yarak in amazement, and then began relating what had befallen them.

"I want to marry Mary very much, and Mary wants to marry me," he wound up.

Los brought out a fat book.

"So you've decided to marry? Fine! that's fine! I'll register you right away. How old are you, Yarak?"

"I don't know. We don't count our age. I was a little boy when Charlie took me in. Mary was three years younger."

"And how old is Mary?"

Mary, hiding her face behind Yarak, answered:

"Charlie says I will be twenty-one this summer."

"That means Yarak is twenty-four. We'll take it at that. He looks it."

Los brought out a large sheet of paper and wrote on it in a big sprawling hand:

CERTIFICATE

It is hereby certified that citizen Yarak and citizen Mary Thompson have been registered as married at the office of the Local Commissioner of the Kamchatka Revolutionary Committee for the Chukotsk County.

Commissioner *Los*
Secretary *Zhukov*

Los read the paper out, the newlyweds hanging on his lips.

At the mention of Thompson's name Yarak squirmed. When the reading was over he said:

"Charlie should be crossed out in that paper. Who wants him there?"

Yarak watched Los take a red little stone out of a drawer and light it with a match. Blood began to drip thickly from the stone as from a wounded walrus. Los sprinkled some drops of this blood onto the certificate, breathed on a little round iron fixed to a handle and banged it down on the stain, pressing the paper hard against the table.

Yarak and Mary watched these proceedings with keen interest and did not miss a single movement of this big bearded man who had brought such a good law to their country.

The sealing over Los handed the certificate solemnly to Yarak.

"I congratulate you," he said, and shook their hands. "You are splendid, Yarak. You're a revolutionary! Translate that to him, Andrei!"

"I'd like to see you translating the word 'revolutionary.' It's not so simple," answered Zhukov.

"Don't you worry, Andrei, we'll get it translated. They'll learn that word! They'll learn it!"

Yarak took the marriage paper, carefully folded it and secreted it in his bosom.

"Where are you going now, Yarak?" asked Los.

"To the hills, to the reindeer man. Rultyna told us to go to her brother Haimelkot. Afterwards we shall go back to the coast, when Charlie dies," said Yarak gaily, winking at his wife.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The news of Yarak's and Mary's flight sped like wild-fire along the coast. Their names were in everybody's mouth.

The rumour reached the Enmakai settlement too. It stirred a strange exultant thrill in Tygrena's breast. But there was no one with whom she could discuss the news. Narginaut since her sister had come was no longer friendly with her, and she felt very lonely. Her only joy was the thought of the coming baby. "There he is, there he is!" she would say to herself, feeling her big belly. She was to become a real woman after all!

Allitet being away she decided to pay a visit to old Vaal's yarang. Meeting Alek, Tygrena cried joyfully:

"I can hear him living here in my belly!"

Old Vaal and Alek, and especially Vaamcho, were glad for Tygrena's sake.

"Alek, people say that the bearded chief told Mary: 'A person cannot live without marriage....' He made them a marriage paper with fire and blood. And he is a stranger, mind you—a white man...."

The old man removed his pipe from his mouth and said:

"Yes, he understands. He has the eyes of a reindeer. Vaal is quick at sizing up good men. I know a beast's mind by its ways and a man by his eyes. We have had many

Tangs here but none of them could understand the desire of our heart. The Bearded One understands!"

The old man paused, puffed at his pipe and resumed:

"But he made a mistake. He made one mistake. He should not have stopped in our yarang. I knew beforehand that Alitet would take his traps back. Where can we get traps now? A man without traps is like a sledge without dogs."

"Vaal, the new Merican is giving traps on loan. The Bearded One told him to."

"Who has brought that news?" exclaimed Vaamcho.

"I do not know," said Tygrena. "But I know that he is already giving traps. Alitet is sure of it, that is why he was angry and swore. Now he has rushed off to see Charlie—to complain, I suppose."

"Let him complain. Charlie Red Nose is now a weak man. He has been tied on a chain, like a little dog," observed Vaamcho.

"I believe Alitet will want to go to Haimelkot, to take the dogs from Yarak. It was he who gave Charlie Red Nose the team as a gift. Maybe he will take Mary too?"

"Yarak has a marriage paper," said Vaamcho.

"It is said that the brand on it broke during the night—they slept with it under their heads. Only a small red piece is left. Yarak has shut the paper up in a wooden box and carries it in his bosom. But it must be spoilt now that the brand is broken. What is a marriage paper for?" asked Tygrena.

Old Vaal uttered thoughtfully:

"Why is there a herdsman in the herd? To protect the reindeer from the wolves. Maybe the marriage paper, like the herdsman, protects the young couple? Who can know all the mysteries of the new law?"

"It is hard to understand, but it is very interesting," said Tygrena.

"Tygrena, where is Aye now?" asked Vaamcho.

"I have heard said that he has wandered with the herds far beyond the mountains. In the summer, people say, he will bring his herds to the coast. I suppose he has married."

"And you, Vaamcho, must go without fail to the new Merican and find out all about the trap news. We may be left without any traps," said the old man. He struck a match, lit his pipe and continued: "Much news is afoot on the coast of late. I fear something may happen. I had a dream that a hare devoured a wolf. A weak little hare devoured a wolf."

At Loren surprising things were happening.

Mr. Thompson conceived a hatred for everybody, especially for Rultyna. He allowed no one into his room, and prepared his meals himself. He went outdoors when everybody else had gone to sleep. He even stopped going to see Mr. Simons.

"Simons wants me to leave Mary behind," thought Mr. Thompson. "He wants Charles Thompson to take only his bank accounts with him to Canada without the heirs. Oh, I know what he's after, the fox!"

And soon, for no apparent reason, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Simons stopped meeting.

The hunters no longer brought the news to Charlie Red Nose. He even had no idea of the whereabouts of Mary and Yarak. The sight, through his window, of Mr. Simons airing his pelts drove Mr. Thompson to distraction. With hands clasped behind his back he paced his room like a caged tiger. All the carefully nurtured habits of a lifetime had gone to the winds—he did not even cross out the dates on his calendar and stopped reading the newspapers and magazines. He took to going to bed at unscheduled hours and lay long with staring eyes, thinking:

"I wish it was summer already. . . . I wish the ice disappears—I won't stay here a single moment. The children? They have Norwegian blood in their veins. Mixed with that savage blood. . . . No, no! Ben is a real European. He's my real son. Mary too. . . . But Bertha? Merely the name, nothing more. Ben's illiterate! Not to be able to read or write at the age of twelve! Would such a thing be possible in a civilized country—with a rich father too? Here he runs about the yarangs with the filthy natives eating that horrible meat of theirs and relishing it too. Where have I been all this time?"

Mr. Thompson sprang out of bed and began nervously pacing the room again.

He saw Alitet through the window standing by his sledge, surrounded by a group of urchins. Mr. Thompson ran out.

"I have been wating for you so long!" he cried eagerly.

"I have been riding about the tundra collecting debts." They went inside.

"Bad times have come, Alitet!" said Charlie, seating himself in the rocking chair.

"Oi, very bad, Charlie! My ears refuse to hear about the Russian chief. My eyes refuse to look at him. On my way to you I tried to avoid him. But I had to deliver him some fox pelts—a fine or something," said Alitet, pulling out the receipt.

"What? A hundred pelts!" cried Mr. Thompson, letting loose a string of oaths. "But that's sheer robbery! A thief steals when the master is not at home, but he has taken the pelts out of your own hands! He took forty-three pelts from me as well!"

"My heart wanted to jump out of my body when the Russian chief bundled my furs into his bag. Why has such a chief come to the coast? It was good without him—we were beginning to do big trading!"

"What other news have you heard?" Mr. Thompson asked peevishly.

"He said I must not trade with the schooners. If I do he will take everything away from me—my dogs as well."

"How many pelts have you collected this time?"

"Oi, very many! They are all hidden away. I shall wait for Brown again. He did good trading with me. We made some trade on paper too." And Alitet brought forth the Black Beetle document.

Mr. Thompson wiped his glasses and read it.

"What is it? Is it a bad paper?" asked Alitet in alarm as he watched Charlie's expression.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, let me read it again. I can't see properly," answered Charlie, casting about in his mind what to say.

"That's all right, Alitet. This paper is the same as goods. I trade like that too. I forgot to tell you that. Captain Brown will not be coming this summer. His schooner has broken down. It will take a long time to mend."

"Ai-ai-ai!" said Alitet, shaking his head. "Brown himself was afraid for his schooner—it was too light in a storm. I stowed all my walrus tusks and whalebone in it according to the paper, but just the same they were probably not enough. Who shall I sell my furs to this time? I have very many. I shall not sell them to the new Merican. He is at one with the bearded Russian."

"We'll have to take our furs to America ourselves this summer. We could do it easily on your whaleboat."

"Yes, my whaleboat is a good, strong boat."

"You will take me to the American coast—I too have a stock of fifteen hundred pelts. In the winter, when the prices in America are high, I shall sell your furs and mine and then come back to you together with Captain Brown. He is my trading friend. We shall not bring the

schooner to Enmakai, but a little way past the gorge, so that no eye should see. Do you understand?"

"That's right," whispered Alitet. "We must not let Vaamcho see. He has turned bad altogether and made friends with the Russians."

"And I'll give you a paper for your furs, Alitet, like the one Brown gave you."

"Good, Charlie! Very good!"

"Beware of Rynteu, Alitet. They have made him a chief here. Ha-ha! A chief! He would never have had a yarang of his own if not for me. The Russian chief spoils people. I am afraid, Alitet, that the Russian chief may not let us take the furs out."

"We must kill him!" hissed Alitet. "And set fire to the new Merican's store. Then you and I will be able to trade once more. He must be killed. It was he who helped to take your girl away. They are now living in Haimelkot's camp."

"With Rultyna's brother?"

"Yes, yes!"

Mr. Thompson lit his pipe and paced the room.

"Charlie, if we could lure the Russian into the hills I would kill him there," whispered Alitet with a cautious glance at the door.

"If you want I can fix it up so that you meet him in the hills."

"Ai, I want, I want very much! But how will you do it?"

"Wait, I'll soon be back."

Mr. Thompson scattered some rubbish outside his door and called Rultyna.

"Well, you bawd, do you think because you've packed Mary off to Haimelkot I've got to clear the rubbish from my door myself? Sweep it up at once!" he shouted.

Deliberately leaving the door ajar he went back into the room.

Rultyna came to the door with a brush and shovel and heard Charlie saying in a loud voice:

"Alitet, go at once to Haimelkot and bring back Mary and my dogs."

He went up to the door, shut it to, and leaning over to Alitet added in a whisper:

"She has heard and will quickly spread the news. The Russian chief will surely get to hear of it. Maybe now you will meet him in the hills."

"Ai, Charlie, what a big head you have! A Merican head!" cried Alitet with a gleam in his eyes.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

It was a perfectly still morning. Not a cry, not a squeak or rustle disturbed the silence of the tundra. The air streamed over the valleys and mountain gorges. At times its currents seemed almost tangible and flowed as smoothly as the waters of great rivers in calm weather. And over the far-flung tundra hung a vast and deep-blue sky without a single cloudlet.

A spry and nimble white fox darted out of its lair. It was no longer as snowy white as in midwinter. Its colour had faded in the spring sun and its coat was now tinged with yellow. The fox, a female, peered swiftly and anxiously around, then disappeared again underground.

Soon eight cubs came tumbling out of the lair. They were silly little things in their babyhood and stood huddled together before the entrance. The mother scattered them apart with her muzzle and trotted off in search of breakfast. The baby foxes gazed about them fearfully but with great curiosity. This was their first sight of the world. They basked in the warming rays of the sun and began to frisk about. Suddenly the dark shadow of a

large-eyed Polar owl hovered over them with a heavy flapping of wings. The young foxes disappeared in a flash into their subterranean dwelling.

There they sat cowering, waiting impatiently for their mother's return. She would usually bring them a live mouse, a ptarmigan or a piece of reindeer meat left over from a wolf's dinner, or the flesh of the seal laid out by the trappers.

Mother fox came running back driving a mouse towards her children. With little black snouts twitching excitedly and paws lifted in the air they pounced upon the prey and dug their sharp little claws into it. Thus the young foxes learned the wisdom of life. When they gained strength and experience they would venture into the great tundra, leaving a chain of little tracks in the snow.

Old Vaal, too, emerged from his yarang as from some dark burrow and squinted at the sun rising over the sea. He tightened his girdle and made his way slowly into the tundra, to search for the lairs of the white fox. One had to discover this in good time, in order to know where to lay the bait to get the foxes used to the places where the traps would be set.

The old man hobbled on, and his blue shadow swayed in front of him. He was thinking: "A rifle now costs two white fox pelts, and one can buy enough tea for one pelt to last a whole year. How then can a trapper not take care that his hunting should be good?"

Old Vaal climbed a small hill and raised his arm, throwing an elongated dancing shadow far out into the tundra across the gleaming snow to the very edge of the earth.

He moved his arm from side to side, admiring the monstrous shadow. It formed an angle which no dog-team could gallop round in a single day.

Vaal walked about the tundra for a long time, making mental notes of likely fox haunts. By evening he felt very

tired and coming across a boulder warmed by the sun he sat down on it and dozed off.

The old man had been away since the morning. He did not return home that day. It was only on the third day that he was found dead with an ear torn off. The old man's teeth stood revealed through a lacerated cheek. The claws of the grizzly bear had left their terrible mark on the old man's face. Vaal lay huddled beneath the carcass of the bear. One arm was thrust almost to the elbow in the beast's jaws, the other clasped the shaggy neck in a convulsive grip. The bear had evidently attacked the old man while he was asleep. But Vaal had conquered the lord of the tundra at the cost of his own life.

It was not often that men died as old Vaal had died. The sorrowful news was the talk of all the yarangs. A man rich in the lore of the sea, a wise counselor had died in mortal combat with the grizzly bear, like a real hunter.

Vaamcho mourned his loss deeply. After the funeral he shut himself up in his yarang. Custom ordained that he should not hunt for thirty days. Alek having gone to the stream for fresh-water ice Vaamcho sat alone in the polog with his sad thoughts, smoking a pipe. It is not good when the yarang is too roomy. It is miserable. It would be good if children came quickly. A yarang must be noisy.

Outside, Tumatuge, the centre of a crowd of hunters, was excitedly relating the latest news which he had just heard from Korauge the shaman.

"Vaamcho has become 'shir-man,'" Tumatuge was saying. "Why should our people be given nicknames? Korauge said: 'That is why old Vaa! died.' Now, what sort of chief is Vaamcho, I ask you? He does not even possess a full team of dogs. Seven dogs instead of twelve! The spirits bore a grudge against such a shir-man-chief! That is why misfortune befell him."

The hunters shuddered as they listened to Tumatuge. O, Tumatuge was always first to know the news! No one was so often in Alilet's yarang as he was.

"Besides, what do we need chiefs for on the coast?" said Tumatuge. "We never had them before. People have lived and been born without any chiefs. The bearded Russian made them up. And what for? No one knows. I suppose the Bearded One wanted to breed his own tribe of shir-man-chiefs on the coast! Korauge said that the bear smelled the shir-man—that is why he came so close to the coast. It's never happened before. The grizzly bear lives in the hills. What has he to do here?"

"That must be right," thought the hunters. "Why didn't the bear kill old Vaal before, when Vaaincho was not yet shir-man?"

The thing became perfectly clear to everybody. Men were simply amazed how easily Korauge the shaman had unravelled the mystery. They would never have guessed it themselves! The sinister new word "shir-man" flew along the coast like a feather driven before the wind.

The news also penetrated to the yarang of Vaamcho, the chairman of the Tribal Soviet. It was an excited Alek who brought it. Emptying the ice into the tub and shaking with terror she began telling Vaamcho how Korauge had divined the bear's designs. It was said that her turn would be next if Vaamcho remained chief.

Vaamcho drew a paper out of a greasy little box. That paper said that Comrade Vaamcho was the chairman of the Enmakai Tribal Soviet. Vaamcho was not able to "talk" with the paper, but the Russian chief had talked with it for him. It had all seemed amusing at the time and had even drawn a smile from Vaamcho. But see what that amusement had cost him—a bear had killed his father.

Vaamcho sat turning the paper over in his hands, thinking long and hard.

Alek sat down beside him. She slipped off her fur garments with a single movement of her shoulder, nestled up to Vaamcho and took his hand in hers, saying softly:

"Vaamcho, men say that you must hie you to Korauge. . . . You do not like him, I know. But you must go all the same. . . . Men do not talk for nothing. The being that lives in my belly wants you very much to go to Korauge. He does not want more evil to fall on our yarang."

Vaamcho glanced at his wife. There was a look of deep sorrow in his face. He placed his hand on her abdomen, stroked it and said:

"Tell him, the person that lives inside you, that I shall go at once to Korauge."

Vaamcho threw a parka over his shoulders, folded up the paper which he hid in his bosom and went out.

Alek watched him with radiant eyes.

Vaamcho, with drooping head and the air of a guilty boy, crept into the shaman's apartment. Korauge sat alone scratching his head with claw-like nails, hunting insects.

Without waiting for the usual greetings Vaamcho raised his eyes to the shaman and said:

"Korauge, now I too know why my father perished. Here it is, the shir-man paper."

"Give it here! I must have a good look at it!" croaked Korauge.

The shaman screwed up his eyes and spread the paper out on his skinny bare knees with trembling hands.

"There, see how it struggles to run away!" he growled.

Korauge clawed the paper and began studying it closely.

Vaamcho watched him breathlessly.

"Come closer!" Korauge beckoned him. "Look your-

self.... Do you see hills on it? Look! and here at the side a bear's head is peeping out...."

Vaamcho looked and a great terror seized him. At the bottom of the paper where the seal stood he could really make out the head of a bear and the outline of hills.

"Stop being shir-man! As for the paper, it must be burnt in a Tang fire. Make some shavings out of Tang boards, pour Tang lamp fat on them and set it alight! Take care that its foul smoke should not be blown on the yarangs. Let all the people of the settlement be gathered together. Let them see how it writhes and hisses in impotent fury against the power of the spirits. Unless you do this He will come and kill Alek when she next gathers edible roots. Here, take it!" And the shaman flung the paper from him with loathing.

Vaamcho picked it up and went out. In the passage he met Tygrena. He smiled shamefacedly and shrunk before her gaze. Tygrena, supporting her big stomach with her hands, stared at him with unblinking eyes. She waved her hand towards the door and said quietly:

"Go! What a foolish seal you are, Vaamcho!"

Soon all the people gathered at the edge of the settlement. On the little snow bank where once he had slain his favourite dog Chegit, Vaamcho laid out the wood shavings in a pile. The people crowded round the spot and watched the shaman with bated breath. Korauge took a bottle of kerosene from under his garment, splashed its contents over the shavings, and said:

"Put a match to it!"

Vaamcho lit the fire which flared up so swiftly that he was obliged to spring back.

"Throw it in, quickly!" commanded the shaman.

Vaamcho threw the paper into the fire. It was consumed in an instant and no trace of it was left. The fire quickly died down.

"Pile snow on it so that the wind may level and destroy all trace of this foul spot."

Vaamcho went home, thinking: "The same smell as that on the bait by the Three Hills. That smell of Tang lamp fat one can never forget. . . . But how was it—all the women came to the fire, and only Tygrena did not come? What can it mean? Why did Tygrena look so angry when I met her in the passage? It is difficult to know what Tygrena thinks."

At the moment when the people gathered around the bonfire Tygrena was seized with the first pangs of childbirth and she withdrew quickly into her own special polog.

A woman must give birth alone and no one else must be present. It was forbidden even to look in at her. Neither could a burner be lighted. For the craft and wiles of the evil spirits know no bounds. The place where a human being was to be born had to be carefully concealed. But the spirits were very cunning. They had already raised a strong wind. The dry walrus skins covering the roof of the yarang rattled loudly. . . .

Tygrena lay in the dark polog on a specially prepared couch of reindeer skins. Her body was racked by terrible pains, but she knew that she dare not utter a single moan. The evil spirits must not know that a human being was to be born here. Did she not desire to become a mother? She tried to stifle the agonizing pain with thoughts of the coming appearance of a new life, a new person who would grow up to be a real hunter or a real woman.

Ineffable joy struggled with excruciating pains. Now she would smile through a mist of tears, now listen fearfully to the raging wind. Sometimes she stopped breathing, terrified lest she reveal her presence. The wind moaned. The evil spirit must be somewhere close at hand.

With tear and anxiety in her heart she lay in an agony of suspense, waiting to hear the first cry of the newborn creature. Tygrena knew from the other women that delivery was sometimes difficult and the woman then had to be helped by having the child squeezed out by the aid of a board. But in such cases the evil spirit quickly discovers the spot where a person is being born and the child perishes.

No, Tygrena would not utter a sound, not if it took her three days to deliver herself. She would rather die in silence.

Suddenly the impulse to scream became overpowering. She dug her teeth into her hand until it bled, trying to kill that other dreadful pain. And every time she felt that she was losing consciousness Tygrena started to bite herself.

She felt hot. She wanted to drink. Her lips were parched. But she was now unclean and could not use the common vessels, and had not had time to prepare her own.

A crowd of women had gathered outside the polog. They wore a look of anxiety and each of them strained her ears to catch the child's cry or Tygrena's call for assistance. One might fail to hear the feeble voice of an exhausted woman in such a strong wind. But dead silence reigned in the polog of the suffering woman.

In the night Tygrena at last heard the voice of the new human being. Mustering her last feeble strength she did the ministrations herself. She tied the umbilical cord with a hair from her head, bit it off with her teeth, sprinkled it with the ash of burnt birch-bark and fell back on the skins exhausted but happy.

The new human being wailed.

Tygrena raised herself with an effort and gazed into the child's face, whispering :

“Make a noise, little one! Do not be such a quiet person as your father Vaamcho!”

Hearing the child's cry the women outside exchanged joyful glances. One of them crept into Tygrena's polog. She lighted the burner, then picked up the child and carried it out. The child was quickly rubbed down with snow and brought back to the warmth of its mother's body.

“Another hunter has arrived at our settlement,” said the woman.

Alitet drove up on his dog-team. Grim and silent he made his way straight to his yarang without answering the men who accosted him. He had no sooner entered the passage than the wail of an infant struck his ears. Alitet stopped, listened and asked:

“What is that?”

“A son has been born, Alitet,” answered one of the women.

Throwing off his parka Alitet hastened into his wife's apartment. Tygrena was dozing.

Alitet bent over the child, pulled it out of its mother's arms and looked into its eyes.

Tygrena started up and snatched the child away from him, clutching it to her bosom.

“I thought he would have light eyes, like the Merican,” said Alitet disappointed.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Monstrous rumours crept all along the coast from settlement to settlement. So does a heavy mist come creeping up from yarang to yarang on the seashore, gradually shutting out the sun.

The new law of life which the bearded Russian chief had brought from the distant mainland swiftly

assumed the shape of an evil spirit of sickness, affliction and calamity.

Soon after Vaamcho had burnt his paper in the public bonfire nearly all the chairmen of the Tribal Soviets came posthaste to the Revcom. They filled the room in an excited crowd.

Their sudden appearance surprised Los.

"What is the matter, comrades," he asked, not without agitation.

An elderly hunter stepped out of the crowd, took off his cap and wiped his perspiring face with it.

"Chief! Take back this paper that you have left in my yarang! It has taken my sleep from me. My wife fell very ill because of it. I am afraid to be shir-man-chief. Let Ayak, our shaman, be the chief. For him it is not taboo. He will be able to drive the evil spirits off if anything happens. He will make a good chief," said the chairman of the Tribal Soviet, laying his paper on the table.

"Well, and what have the others come here for?" asked Los.

"We have also brought our papers back," came the answer from all sides.

"Good. Put them on the table! But know this—I will not appoint any shaman as chairman. You may tell them so."

The chairmen laid their credentials on the table one after another. Only one man, the chairman of the Loren Tribal Soviet, Rynteu, stood motionless, staring at everybody with a puzzled look.

"Well, Rynteu, why don't you put your paper on the table?"

"I left my paper at home, in an empty teabox," answered the old man.

"Why didn't you bring it with you?"

"I have come on other business."

"Ah! I see!" exclaimed Los, visibly pleased.

He drew out his pipe and, amid a general silence, leisurely filled it, then lit up and said to the old man:

"You will have to wait, Rynteu, until I have done talking to these men."

"I can wait," said the old man.

The chairmen in their dark brown fur parkas stood huddled in a bunch. Their eyes gleamed with excitement in dark weatherbeaten faces. None of them plucked up courage to smoke.

"Comrades!" began Los. "Now listen to what I have to say. I know why you have come here. The news reaches us as well. Do you think I am not sorry for old man Vaal? I am very sorry. He was my great friend. He was a man with a great mind. He was a good old man. A man with a real heart."

The chairmen became attentive. Los puffed at his pipe and resumed:

"But I want to ask you all one thing—did anybody ever die before these papers appeared in your yarangs?"

"People die on the coast every year," answered a voice in the crowd.

"Have hunters stranded on a drifting ice floe ever perished?"

"It happens every year."

"Have bears not killed men before?"

The hunters were silent.

Then Rynteu slowly elbowed his way through the crowd and went up to the table.

"I will speak," the old man began. "I am older than you all. I saw the sun before any of you. When Charlie traded you all put up in my traveller's yarang. There is no other yarang on the coast which heard so much news as mine. And I remember all the news. Every year the grizzly bear kills one or another herdsman. Who was it killed Chang the herdsboy last sum-

mer? Was it not you, Kotkhyrgyn, who brought that news to my yarang? I heard it with these very ears." The old man pulled himself by the ears. "What are you? Silly seals? Why have you begun to forget so much? That is bad. You should not forget!" And the old man went back to his place.

Los stroked his beard, stood up and said:

"Comrades! I believe bad people are misleading you. Wicked people. People who do want there to be good trading. Maybe they themselves want to carry on trade again in the old way? Like Charlie Red Nose, like Alitet! What do you think? But I shall not allow them to trade."

The men said nothing for a long time. Finally Kotkhyrgyn went up to the table, took one of the papers and said:

"I am taking back my paper."

"Wait a minute, Kotkhyrgyn, it may not be yours! Let me see!"

"And I take mine . . . and mine . . . and I too!" came other voices.

Los sorted out the certificates and gave them back to their owners.

"Loke, where is Loke? His paper is left."

"Loke has gone. He does not want to take it," someone said.

After this Los had a long talk with the chairmen, and it was evening before they took their departure.

When Zhukov came back from the hunt Los related to him what had taken place.

"It's very difficult, Nikita Sergeyevich, for us two to handle the whole coast," said Andrei thoughtfully.

"What we need is teachers, Andrei. Teachers and instructors and our own trading posts. The Americans are of no help to us in this matter. The people have

got to have things explained to them. We've got to fight the shamans' influence."

"That's true enough, Nikita Sergeyevich, but that's not all. Explaining things won't carry you very far. I think to start with, the hunters should be given more for the eye than the mind."

"Nonsense! We need both."

"Let me finish.... Now, say, we ship out here a dozen or so whaleboats and distribute them with proper discrimination. The economic aspect is a very important thing, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"But we already wrote in about that early last winter. Have you begun to forget, as old Rynteu says? Maybe we haven't made out the case sufficiently strongly. Let's have a look at the outgoing files and see what we wrote."

They hunted up the "Re: Whaleboats" copy and Los went over it carefully.

"Of course, this is not the thing! Our argument should be this—motor-driven whaleboats are the only basis on which the backward whaling and seal hunting industry can be reconstructed. Here, find packet No. 93 in the box and we'll rewrite the thing." Los, with a grin, added: "That's the only advantage of our mail. You suddenly remember at the end of the year that you've messed up a report and fish it out again and rewrite it."

Andrei turned the long since "posted" mail out on the floor and began rummaging in it on hands and knees. After a search he found packet No. 93.

"Open it carefully so that we can slip the new report into the same packet."

Old Rynteu appeared in the doorway.

"Where did you disappear to, Rynteu? I was about to look for you. What business was it you wanted to see me about?" asked Los.

"Bad business. Very bad. Rultyna came to me with bad news. Charlie has sent Alitet to Haimelkot to get Mary and take the dogs from Yarak."

Los and Andrei looked at each other.

"Bad business," went on Rynteu. "I am afraid Rultyna will lose her mind...."

"Yes, it's a bad business," said Los with a sigh. "What's to be done, Rynteu? What do you think?"

"I don't know," the old man answered evasively. "You know best."

"We must follow on Alitet's trail," said Los.

The old man nodded his head approvingly.

"You can't travel in the hills without a guide, Nikita Sergeyevich," said Andrei. "You're bound to lose your way."

"I know the way very well," said Rynteu. "Charlie used to send me into the hills for pelts. I'll show you the way."

"Good. Well, Andrei, let's go and finish the clipping of Alitet's wings. I'll show him what's what! How many days' journey is it, Rynteu?"

"The midnight sun has come now. We can do it in four days.

"Not what you'd call near. But we've got to go. While we're about it we'll see how people are living in the mountains. So that's decided!" said Los. "Shut up the office, Andrei."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The May sun beat down hotly. It was already quite warm, although the porous heavy snow still lay all around. Only the wind-swept mountainsides, on which the snow could not obtain a footing even in the winter, were bare and dark.

Los stood in the valley gazing at the mountains that stretched away in the distance.

"What's in those mountains?" thought Los. "Maybe platinum, gold or iron—who knows?" Turning to Andrei he said, pointing to the compass:

"Rynteu says this gadget doesn't work in the hills—points the wrong way. I asked him whether the sea lay on this side and he laughed and said: 'Don't look at that little box—look at the sun, and then you will know on which side the sea is.'"

"Apparently there's something in those mountains that throws the compass out, Nikita Sergeyevich. If only we had some kind of X-ray to take a peep at what's inside them!"

The dogs sprawled in the snow, dozing in the warm sun. Travelling was possible only at night when the sun was low and a light frost had hardened the trail. Rynteu had gone in search of faggots for lighting a fire to boil some water.

Polar owls flitted by one after another with a heavy flap of wings, turning their heads from side to side. They were the harbingers of a fox incursion. For owls signified the presence of lemmings, and after the lemmings would come the foxes.

The reindeer herds moved down closer to the sea coast where the summer breezes and air currents gave them relief from the pestering clouds of midges. No herd could be kept together in the hills during the summer. The lowland teems with lemmings, fair game for all the wild creatures of the tundra who cram themselves with this prey. Even a reindeer, upon catching sight of a lemming, will toss its head and give chase. It kills the little creature with its hoof and devours it on the spot. Hares scamper in hundreds through the river valleys, nibbling the bark and leaves of the willows. Mountain rams bound from rock to rock. Here all life is on

the move, everything leads a nomadic existence. The hills alone stand motionless as though wrapped in contemplation of the tundra life.

Old Rynteu came back to the sledges carrying two handfuls of willow twigs. The idea of boiling water for tea with this "firewood" tickled Los. But Rynteu, unperturbed, cut off small pieces of willow, split them down, laid them out cunningly and lit a fire. He tended it carefully, keeping the flame alive by a sparing use of the twigs.

"There's ingenuity for you!" said Los in admiration. "Learn the trick, Andrei, it may come in useful!"

"After tea we shall sleep," said Rynteu. "A mist is creeping up—it will soon be here. I cannot find the trail in a mist. To Alitet it is all the same. He travels in a mist as though the sun were shining."

After two days' travelling they came upon the frameworks of nomad dwellings. The dogs made a dash for what they thought to be habitation. But there was not a soul in sight. Everything around was desolate and deserted. And only the neat piles of chattels bore witness to recent occupation.

"What's this? Deserted?" enquired Los.

"No, they've left their belongings here. They'll pick them up in the winter, on their way back," Rynteu explained.

"But where are the people?"

"They're nomads, they've moved on. Quite recently," said Rynteu closely examining the reindeer sledge tracks and tufts of reindeer hair lying in the snow.

The old man was reading the great book of the tundra.

"They departed at noon today," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

"The reindeer hair has not had time to sink into the snow under the sun. And here is the midday spoor

of the reindeer. In the evening and the morning it is different. Alitet has been here."

Rynteu took Andrei by the hand led him aside with Los following.

"Look, this is the track of a nomad's sledge and this of a man of the coast—Alitet's sledge."

"Perhaps it is Yarak's sledge?"

"No," said the old man firmly. "When Yarak went away men did not ride on iron runners. This is the track of an iron runner. It is Alitet's. See how smooth it is?"

The old man went in search of Yarak's tracks and soon they heard him call:

"Here it is! I have found it!"

The tracks made by the unplated runners were less glossy and the surface was slightly concave and rough.

"Well, I'll be blowed! How simple it is!" cried Los in amazement.

"Rynteu, have the nomads gone far?" asked Andrei.

"No. They cannot go very far in one day. Now that we have struck their trail we can overtake them quickly. A heavy baggage train has passed. But keep a strong hold on the dogs. They go mad when they see reindeer. Take my gee pole. I can brake with my heels."

The dogs dashed off impetuously along the reindeer trail. Los and Andrei rode in front, Rynteu bringing up the rear. Suddenly the dogs pulled up short and lifted their heads with nervously twitching noses in the air, then tore off again at breakneck speed. Reindeer came in sight on the hillsides. A huge herd of reindeer! The dogs seemed to have run amuck.

"Pot-pot! Pot-pot!" shouted Los hoarsely, trying to head the team off.

Both he and Andrei made frantic efforts to brake the sledges with their gee poles, but the latter were dragged along by the madly racing team, leaving deep ruts behind them in the snow. The quivering dogs, with

lolling tongues and blazing eyes bore steadily down on the herd.

"Pot-pot! Pot-pot!" cried old Rynteu.

It is a disgrace for a team driver if he proves unable to control his dogs and lets them tear a reindeer to pieces. The nomad men would laugh him to shame!

Old Rynteu swung his leg over the sledge, and straddling it dug both heels into the snow in an effort to check the team. But his heels slipped over the smooth snow and he could not bring the sledge to a stop.

A herdsman watching the approaching sledges suddenly waved his arms and rushed across their path. Flinging himself upon the first sledge he threw an arm round Andrei's neck for support, tore the gee pole out of his hand, drove it hard into the snow, bringing the team to a halt.

Rynteu's sledge flashed past with the old man making vain efforts to dig his heels into the snow. He blushed with shame. Jumping off the hurtling sledge he turned it over and threw himself upon the runners. The team came to a stop. The dogs began to howl.

"Aye! You here?" cried Andrei in astonishment.

"Two reindeer strayed from Yatkhyrgyn's herd. He sent me to look for them. I have been searching five days! I was now on my way to Haimelkot's herd to see if they were there. Suddenly I see your dogs making for the herd—I guessed at once who it was. I thought—those must be white men riding, they cannot brake the sledges. So I ran to help."

Aye talked to Andrei as to an old friend, staring meanwhile hard at the bearded Russian chief, reports of whom had already reached the people of the hills.

"What is the news in the hills, Aye?"

Aye smiled sadly.

"What news can there be in the hills? Here we have only reindeer. Reindeer are born, reindeer die,

there is nothing but reindeer. The news is on the coast. Life there is jolly, but here we live like wolves. All the time on the run. I think of leaving the nomad people. Ah, how I long for the coast!"

"Why do you want to leave, Aye?" asked Andrei.

"I am miserable here. I am tired of running about. My master Yatkhyrgyn says that I have strong legs. He always sends me to search for stray reindeer. And so he keeps me running all the winter. Yet I fear to leave. My master, when he was yet a young man, became a chief. The Russians had sent a paper to his father. When his father died Yatkhyrgyn took the paper. Only he does not know what is written in the paper. He has a chief's knife as well. I saw it. A long thin knife called a dirk. He uses it for slaughtering reindeer. He gave me the paper and told me, if ever I met a Russian, to find out what it is about."

Aye drew out from his bosom something wrapped up in a rag, carefully unfolded it and handed Andrei a dirty scrap of paper.

"Why, it's an oath of allegiance to the tsar!" said Andrei.

"Read it!" said Los.

Making out the illegible script with difficulty, Zhukov read the following:

"I do hereby solemnly swear before God the Creator that I shall be a faithful, obedient and good subject with all my family to the Great, True and Good Tsar of all the Russias Alexander Nikolayevich and his Royal Majesty's Heir Nikolai Alexandrovich, that I shall have no traffic with foreign lands, that I shall make no friendships with his Royal Majesty's enemies, that in all that pertains to his sublime Royal Majesty's power and

jurisdiction I shall to the best of my intelligence and ability protect and defend without sparing my life and help his Royal Majesty in every way I can, that should I learn anything ill or damaging to the Tsar I shall report it and prevent it, that I shall honour all secrets entrusted to me. All this I will faithfully fulfil with God's help. I kiss the holy Gospels and do swear by the Crucifix of my Creator. So help me God."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Los. "What d'you think of that grand duke with his dirk! And where? In the Arctic mountains of all places!"

"The last bulwark of tsarism," said Andrei with a laugh, and turning to Aye he asked: "May I keep this paper?"

"I am afraid Yatkhyrgyn may ask for it," said Aye irresolutely.

"Tell him that this paper is no good any more. There aren't any more tsars."

"All right, you know best," acquiesced Aye.

The reindeer herd had moved down the other slope of the hill. Aye drove with Andrei to Haimelkot's camp, Los getting into the other sledge with Rynteu. The dogs ran on quietly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

With the arrival of Alitet in Haimelkot's camp the peaceful tenor of men's lives was completely upset. Nobody could understand why Alitet had come to the hills on the very eve of the spring floods. At first people had thought that he had come for fox pelts, but Alitet did not even enquire about them. Everybody was on the

alert. Particularly Yarak. He did not absent himself from the camp and hung on Alitet's heels.

It was Alitet's third day at the camp, and still he had not said a word of what had brought him here. He gorged himself all the time with reindeer meat, as though mustering his strength. When all the camp was asleep Yarak roamed about half-dozing. He had sent Mary to the Hare's Trail valley, ostensibly for twigs, and bidden her not to come back until Alitet had gone.

Old Haimelkot was perfectly aware of the reason why his niece Mary had run away with Yarak and why they were living here. The presence of the uninvited guest, Alitet, irked the old man. But he bore himself with the dignity of a true herder and did not betray his curiosity. Alitet himself, at the end of the third day, told Haimelkot what had brought him.

"You must ask Mary! She is not a reindeer, she can speak for herself. If she wants to, let her go," said Haimelkot.

"She does not wish to go. Charlie told me to bring her back."

Haimelkot smiled:

"A reindeer may be caught and led whither one wishes. It is a dumb beast, a reindeer. But Mary . . . I didn't know that she had antlers growing, over which one could throw a lasso."

"Rultyna and Charlie both said that I was to bring her," repeated Alitet.

The old man screwed up his eyes and wrinkled his nose. After a pause he said:

"Do you take Haimelkot to be a little child? I have lived a long life and know exactly what my sister Rultyna thinks. And have you long turned Tang that you no longer know whether a girl needs a husband or not? Come, lead the stag out of the herd and see whether the females will remain! You had better go to sleep. After-

wards you can have a talk with Yarak. He is her husband."

And when Alitet slept Haimelkot called Yarak and said to him:

"Do not leave the camp! Call me when Alitet begins to talk with you about Mary. You are young and will not know how to talk to that wolf."

"I'll kill him!" cried Yarak vehemently.

"With a knife a weak man can kill a strong one. Hide your knife away. Go to sleep. Lack of sleep makes a man weak."

Two dog-teams appeared racing down the hillside. Thinking it was Charlie a pang of fear shot through Yarak's heart. But suddenly he cried:

"Aye has brought the Russians!" and rushed to meet them.

The sledges stopped.

"Kakomei! Los!" cried Yarak, delighted.

"How do you do, how do you do, Yarak!" said Los shaking hands. "I've come to pay you a visit, you see."

"And Andrei, and Rynteu and Aye here too! Kakomei!" exclaimed Yarak, beaming with joy. "Here is the host himself, my uncle," he said, pointing to Haimelkot who was coming towards them.

Haimelkot, as he approached, keenly examined the unusual visitors. He came up with an unhurried and grave dignity. Los took an instant liking to the old man, whose shrewd face and penetrating eyes impressed him. Holding out his hand he said:

"How do you do, Haimelkot!"

The old man's face broke into a restrained smile. He said:

"Do you know Haimelkot?"

"By hearsay," answered Los.

"Women! Cook the fattest reindeer! Worthy guests have arrived, it seems!" cried Haimelkot.

They all went over to the campfire, over which hung a huge copper cauldron. A little tot in fur clothes, resembling an ungainly bear cub, stumbled across their path. His face was covered with dirt and reindeer blood. Los snatched him up in his arms, and shaking him in the air, asked in Russian:

"Well, little man, how's business?"

The little man set up a wild howl.

"Come, come! I treat you nicely and you behave like that! Here's a lump of sugar. Go on, trot off!" chuckled Los.

"He does not understand anything. Too little. And it's the first time he sees a Tang," said Haimelkot, apologetically as it were.

"Yarak, I do not see Mary! Where is she?" asked Los.

"She went to the river valley to gather willows for the fire. She has been gone a long time," said Yarak in a whisper. "She fears Alitet. Afraid he will take her back to Charlie."

"Let him try!"

Haimelkot gave Los an approving pat on his broad back. That meant that Haimelkot considered him to be a real man.

The hill camp was a temporary abode. There were no yarangs here, only a few skin tents standing under the open sky. Even in the winter and during a blizzard, people used a warm dwelling only for sleeping purposes. On getting up they would take down the skin tent and the women would beat out the icing that had formed on the skins overnight. People of all ages lived in the open air, whatever the weather. A man does not freeze if he keeps awake and walks.

There were numerous baggage sledges standing about Haimelkot's camp. These were roughly made vehicles on heavy runners which served for the transportation

of chattels and dwellings. Here too stood light travelling sledges of delicate workmanship which looked like toys beside the clumsy transports. One could easily pick up such a sledge and carry it away under his arm.

"Aye, what is that hanging on the pole?" asked Andrei.

"It's a baby. Do you want to look at it?"

In a fur bag strung to a post driven into the snow hung a little individual. Two birdlike black little eyes peeped out from the edge of the bag. To all appearances it resembled a little bird in its nest. Swaying gently in the breeze with the warm sun overhead it looked, and probably was, enjoying itself immensely.

"It cannot walk yet," explained Aye.

The meat was cooking in the cauldron over a roaring fire. The women sat watching it. The meat had to be taken out before the water came to the boil. The old man had ordered the meat to be cooked in the proper way, so that it looked appetizing. The tender pink venison, if skilfully cooked, does not burden the stomach. One can eat a large quantity of such meat. Eating competitions are sometimes held in the tundra, there being eaters who can dispatch almost a whole reindeer at a single sitting. After such a meal the eater rolls himself on his stomach and is ready to run after the herds without a morsel of food for two or three days at a stretch.

The women pulled the meat out of the cauldron with pointed sticks and laid it on a large wooden platter. The meat gave off a very appetizing smell. Haimelkot set out the choicest chunks for Los and Andrei. The magnitude of these portions startled the white guests, but they were still more astonished at the ease with which they dispatched them.

The other guests had long finished off the reindeer and were carefully picking the bones.

"Very good meat, Haimelkot! That was a good reindeer," said Los approvingly.

"Every guest who comes to Haimelkot will find a good piece of meat. No one has ever left Haimelkot hungry. Women, cook another reindeer," said the old man.

Alitet awoke and heard the voices of the Russians. He grinned with satisfaction and lay on, straining his ears to catch the talk. At length he got up and went over to the campfire.

"Good day, Russki chief!" said Alitet ingratiatingly. "This is a great festival for Haimelkot. See, how many guests have gathered!"

Alitet squatted down.

"What have you come here for?" demanded Los.

"Every man has business to attend to. Even the beasts run after something in the tundra. . . . Charlie sent me to take the dogs from Yarak. . . . Charlie sold them to me."

"Did you buy them?" demanded Los sternly.

Alitet, after a little hesitation, confirmed that he did.

"And did you buy Mary too?" asked Andrei.

"Charlie said to me: 'Take away the dogs and bring Mary back.' The dogs are his and the girl is his. They were stolen."

Yarak sprang to his feet, but Haimelkot caught him by the arm and drew him back to his seat.

"You will not take anybody from here. Do you understand that?" said Los.

"Chief, I do not know your law. I did what Charlie told me. And Rultyna, Mary's mother, also asked me to go."

Old Rynteu, who had been attentively following the conversation while busy with a bone, said:

"Rultyna did not ask you, Alitet. I know it. Haimelkot also knows that his sister Rultyna did not ask Alitet.

It is not good when a man lies!" he said with a deprecating shake of the head.

"We are setting out tomorrow," said Los, "and you are going with us, Alitet. Get ready."

"If you wish it, I can go. If Mary must not be taken let her remain here. Only seven of my dogs bit through their traces and ran back to the coast together with the lead dog. I don't know how I shall be able to go now," said Alitet.

"I will give him my dogs!" cried Yarak. "Let him only go!"

"No!" Los objected. "He can travel with Rynteu in the same sledge."

"That's right!" readily agreed the old man. "We can harness the rest of his dogs to my team and take his sledge in tow."

"Rynteu," said Alitet, "we must lose no time. The sun shines hotly. How shall we cross the rivers when the water comes?"

"That is true, Alitet," answered Rynteu.

Andrei went with Aye to the river valley. They were very glad to see each other. It had been so long since they had last met!

Haimelkot liked the bearded Russian, and he proposed to Los to go and see his herd. A team of beautiful white reindeer were swiftly harnessed to a light travelling sledge.

"Come with us too, Yarak!" said Los.

"No, I will remain here."

"You have nothing to fear, Yarak. Bear in mind that nobody will harm you as long as I live in this land. It was because of you I came down here. Ask the old man. Rultyna sent him to me."

Yarak smiled in relief.

"Thank you, Los! My heart ceased beating fast when I saw you coming."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Revcom men spent two days in Haimelkot's camp, during which time Los acquainted himself with the methods of deer farming. He was very much astonished to find that Haimelkot, the owner of two thousand heads of reindeer, was really a miserably poor man. The economy was run on a primitive self-supporting basis. People lived on the meat of the reindeer and wore clothes of reindeer skins, and that was all. The animals roamed almost wild about the tundra, shifting to new pasture grounds when the moss had all been eaten, and people followed them like the foxes followed the mice. Many reindeer perished from the wolves, hoof disease, accidents, and early calving during the season of severe spring frosts. And hundreds of thousands of reindeer such as these pastured in the Chukotsk tundra.

"Yes, something's got to be done about this," thought Los, not seeing clearly yet himself in what way this livestock problem was to be properly managed.

On the night of the third day two sledges rode out of the Haimelkot camp. Rynteu and Alitet rode in front. Alitet's sledge, hitched on behind, wobbled from side to side and acted as a drag on the team's progress. Los incessantly braked his sledge. The team strained at the traces, eager and impatient. Slow travelling tires a driver and makes him feel sleepy, whereas swift travel is stimulating. Even the dogs feel better when running at a good speed.

A mist stole up on the horizon and began to roll out on all sides, descending lower and lower. Soon the hill-tops were lost in the thick pall.

"The mist eats the snow up like flame. We must hurry, or we shall be caught in the flood tide, Rynteu," said Alitet.

He was excited, as though the mist worried him, but,

fidgeting restlessly in the sledge, he secretly invoked the spirits to send down a heavier mist.

"The mist will not disperse, Alitet. There is no wind, not a breath of air," said Rynteu uneasily.

The mist advanced to meet them and soon covered the earth. The teams seemed to be sailing in moist white clouds. The sweeping sky hanging over the tundra disappeared.

"That damned Alitet is only holding us up. Hitched his sledge up behind. I've a good mind to drop him and let him go on his five dogs as best he can," said Zhukov in annoyance.

"I can't get those reindeer out of my head, Andrei. What an industry going to waste! Why, even the fish in Kamchatka waters have been included in the state trading plans." And Los, with the gee pole in his hand, shouted at the dogs as they sped across the smooth surface of the snow. Only the backs and bushy tails of the shaft pair could be dimly seen in the heavy mist.

"And here we have immense herds just wandering about like mice in the tundra. We must call a conference of reindeer breeders."

In crossing small ravines over the wet snow the sledge sometimes foundered and glided over the brittle ice of a mountain stream.

"A scratch team always runs badly. We must go faster, Rynteu," advised Alitet.

"Yes, yes! Let the Tangs ride in front. Our dogs will then run more willingly," said Rynteu, not suspecting Alitet's evil designs.

Rynteu halted his team and went up to Los.

"Los, we must hurry. In two more days the rivers may be covered with water. We shall then have to stay in the tundra until the summer. You go ahead and I will shout out to you which way to go."

"Very well!" said Los, pleased with the idea.

He drove his team out ahead. Behind him Rynteu's dogs set off at a livelier pace.

Alitet peered intently into the mist, keenly alert, and whispered:

"Keep to the left, more to the left. The dogs take too much leeway."

"Lo-os! Keep to the left!" shouted Rynteu.

"Krr! Krr!" cried Los to the dogs, and the team obediently veered to the left.

"Here, Rynteu, have a smoke!" said Alitet.

The old man fished out his pipe and held it out gladly. Alitet struck a match on the sledge and they lit up.

"Left, more left!" urged Alitet with growing excitement.

The precipice for which he was heading the Russians' team was somewhere on the left. Judging by the time which they had been travelling they should have reached it already. Alitet inwardly raged and cursed himself for not knowing the trail well enough. "If the team misses the precipice what was the sense in Alitet's coming here? What was the sense in letting loose seven of the dogs during the night? The only thing is to double back on their own tracks and come down again." He was on the point of telling Rynteu to stop the sledge when he heard a shout.

Alitet sprang out of the sledge as quick as lightning and threw himself flat on the ground, digging his hunter's knife into the hard snow on the very edge of the precipice and clutching it for dear life. The next instant Rynteu and his team disappeared into the abyss.

Alitet lay for a long time without stirring. Then, raising his head, he crawled slowly backwards, stood up, ran back a few paces and stopped again.

"Rynteu!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

There was no reply. Alitet drew a sigh of relief, wiped his perspiring face with his cap and walked away into the tundra, swallowed up in the thick mist.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

As an eclipse of the sun throws the tundra people into a turmoil, so did the visit of the two Russian men to Haimelkot's camp cause a great stir and give rise to a host of conjectures. Here, indeed, was food for thought!

Haimelkot even withdrew himself into the seclusion of the tundra where he could think without interference. The conversation with the bearded Russian chief had greatly disturbed him. Indeed, why should the Tangs come to the tundra to heal the reindeer? Illnesses were spirits. They had to live somewhere, these spirits, have their abode in someone. When the time came they would depart. No man lives without illness, and no reindeer can live without it. And did not the people of the hills breed large herds without the aid of the Tangs? Did not his father Ukvytkot have a large herd? And that herd still lived. Ho-ho! That was funny! The Tangs going to heal the reindeer, as the Bearded One said! How could they know what was in a reindeer's mind? Now he, Haimelkot, had spent all his life amid the herd. How many times had he slept during a blizzard under a reindeer's belly! Yet he never knew all the thoughts of a reindeer. He knew what places reindeer liked to choose for calving, knew when and where they should be moved out of the way of the gnats, knew the places where they might split their hooves. He knew how to determine by divination with a reindeer's shoulder blade the proper trail which a herd should take. He knew how to hold the bone over the campfire so that a fissure was made by the heat indicating the direction in which good pasturage lay instead of bare rocks. How could the Tangs know all this?

Old Haimelkot sat on a stone ledge, sunk deep in thought. Utter silence reigned around. The mist began to lift and patches of sky appeared.

The memory of Alitet brought an amused smile to the old man's face. Haimelkot had liked the way the bearded chief had lassoed Alitet. Like a wild stag that enticed the females from the herd. The old man had taken a hearty dislike to Alitet himself, and when the Russian scolded him Haimelkot saw that the bearded chief stood for right. That was good and just. But that talk about the reindeer he did not like at all.

Mary appeared over the crest of the hill with a bundle of willow faggots. She came up to the old man and deposited her burden on the ground.

"Have a rest, Mary. You have grown pale. Perhaps it is because your father is white. Now you can sleep in peace. Alitet will not take you away. He is afraid of the bearded Russian."

"I watched the dog sledges from afar. I thought Charlie himself had come after Alitet. These three days I lived on roots and the hoards which I found in mice holes."

"Did you take all the hoards from them?"

"No, Haimelkot, I took only a half of each hoard."

"You did well, Mary. You must not rob the little mouse of everything—it will die of hunger before it finds more food."

The old man got up and wanted to take the bundle of faggots, but Mary took it from him in silence and throwing it on her back she followed Haimelkot. When they came within sight of the camp Yarak ran forward to meet them. He took the bundle from Mary and burst into a merry laugh.

"Have you heard the news, Mary? Los has been here Alitet obeys him like an old sledge reindeer does the teamster. He does whatever he is told."

And turning aside Yarak shouted:

"Thank you, Los!"

Los was in everybody's thoughts and on everybody's tongue in the camp of Haimelkot. He had come into people like a good spirit and set them thinking about their lives.

Aye sat all day at the campfire, thinking. But thinking alone was very hard. Seeing Yarak he said:

"Let us go, Yarak, and think. Over there, by that little hill. I fear to speak my thoughts before other people."

They walked on in silence amid the hushed tundra. The only sound was the clicking of reindeer hooves, resembling the faint noise of receding ice fields.

"Yarak," said Aye quietly, when they had settled themselves down by the hill, "Los told me: 'In the summer when the ship comes we shall send you to learn on the Russian Mainland. There is a big, big settlement there called Petrograd. There are more people living in that one settlement than in the whole Chukotsk land!' What will I have to learn there? I cannot understand. I have been thinking all night but am none the wiser. My head is in a daze. It's hard to think by one's self."

"You go, Aye! I do not think it will be bad. Did you notice how Los spoke to Alitet and how he spoke to you? His eyes looked different each time. Clearly he wishes you well, he does not wish you harm."

"But Yarak, they said themselves that there are no reindeer in that land, no walruses or seals. How am I going to live? I shall die."

"Aye, when Charlie sent me to work on the American whaler there was a lot of meat of the whale and the walrus on the ship but the Americans did not eat it. We were icebound for many days, and I was left without food. Then I began to eat their food out of iron little boxes and remained alive."

Aye listened attentively to Yarak. It was very interesting to learn how the Tangs lived and what they ate. Yarak had lived with them—he knew them well.

“You have to get used to it, Aye. There is food everywhere. Los means well—he wants to do something good for you. It is Alitet he does not like.”

“Alitet is a bad man, a wicked man. He left me without a wife. I suppose Tygrena no longer remembers me.”

Aye’s face wore a look of distress and longing. He quailed at the thought of going to the land of the Tangs, but what could he do? He did not want to live in the hills and there was no life for him on the coast either. Aye heaved a sigh and said:

“I shall go, Yarak. Come what may!”

While they were talking the mist had lifted.

They retraced their steps to the camp and suddenly saw a man slowly dragging his feet.

“Yarak, look! That’s Alitet.”

Yarak rubbed his eyes hard.

Yes, it was Alitet.

“Yarak, you have turned pale. Do you fear him? Fear not, for now I shall help you. If he tries to take Mary away we shall kill him. He has poured such wrath into my heart that I will let his guts out as I would a reindeer’s,” cried Aye in a towering passion.

In the camp people were already crying:

“Alitet is coming! Alitet!”

Mary ran out of her tent, and seeing Alitet she screamed and darted off in the opposite direction.

Yarak and Aye raced down the hillside towards her.

They ran so fast that their faces were flushed and their caps flew off and dangled from their straps down their backs.

Haimelkot stood calmly in the centre of the camp, thinking: "What made Alitet come back?"

Aye pulled out his knife and concealed it behind his back.

"Give me that knife, Aye," said Haimelkot. "You are strong lads. Or have you grown so weak that you possess no strength without a knife? Why defile my land with the blood of that man? The moss will cease to grow here. And you, too, Yarak, give me your knife."

"Haimelkot, take mine as well," said Mary.

The old man took the knives, laid them on the snow and stood on them.

Alitet came up.

"The Tangs have disappeared," he said in a casual tone. "Rynteu as well. They must have fallen over a precipice."

"How is it that you did not disappear? Did you not travel together?" cried Aye.

"Hold your tongue, you whelp! Or do you think I am talking to you, you wretch! You wifeless man!"

Aye, in a fit of fury, made a dash for Alitet, but Haimelkot seized him by the girdle.

"The conversation is not finished yet!" he said to Aye. "Speak, Alitet!"

Alitet sat down on the snow and held his stomach, his face contorted as though in pain.

"How did you manage to lose them? Did you not ride on Rynteu's sledge?" asked Haimelkot.

"I must have ate too much fat meat," groaned Alitet. "I had to go off the sledge very often and my belly still aches."

Aye quivered with rage. He was well aware that the only precipice hereabouts was Bear's Ear, and that lay quite off the trail.

"Maybe you purposely directed them to the Bear's Ear," cried Aye.

"...Silence! Or I shall give you such a blow you will bite your tongue off," said Alitet.

"Aye is right," said Haimelkot. "Bear's Ear is entirely out of the way. How came you there? It is a deadly spot. Last year the wolves drove eight reindeer over it during a blizzard. The reindeer were dashed to death."

"Merkichkin, Alitet!" swore Yarak, and turning to Aye he asked: "Do you know the spot?"

"I know it very well. I passed it not long ago."

"Let us go there at once. We must look for them."

Haimelkot said:

"It is very far to go on foot. Take my reindeer team, it will take you there quickly."

The young men ran off to harness the reindeer.

Alitet got up, came close up to the old man and whispered:

"If they go on your reindeer the spirits will be angered and your herd will perish from disease."

Haimelkot started. After a moment's thought he cried out:

"Yarak, wait with the harnessing! I'm afraid the reindeer cannot be used."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

A heavy mist hung over the foot of the precipice. Here amid a mass of fallen snow lay Los. Consciousness returning to him with a stab of pain he opened his eyes.

"Where are the rest of 'em? What's happened to the dogs? ... O-o-oh, hell!" he groaned. "Something wrong with the leg." Summoning all his strength he shouted: "Andre-e-e-ei!"

The cry re-echoed down the cliffside.

"Ehe-e-e-ei!" shouted Los still louder.

And again nothing but the echo answered him.

Fighting back the sharp pain Los struggled into a sitting position and began to explore his injured leg.

"Thought so. Broken. Lucky it's not bleeding. . . . But what's happened to Andrei?"

Los began to recollect what had happened.

"When we were falling I felt Andrei quite close to me. That means he can't be far off. He's a lighter weight than I am. . . . Who of us would fall faster? He was on my right. Maybe I turned a sommersault and my right side has now become the left?" Los made his deductions in imitation of old Rynteu when he studied the tracks at the deserted nomad's camp.

Despite the intense pain in his leg Los heaved himself up on his elbows and began to crawl slowly forward, searching the fresh heaps of snow on either side. He broke out into a sweat from the painful effort. After several yards of this arduous progress he gave himself a rest, and placing two fingers in his mouth emitted a piercing whistle.

"Malchik, Malchik!"* he shouted, calling his lead dog, but the cry was lost amid the desolate wilderness.

"Pretty rotten outlook," he thought glumly. "Where have they all got to? Buried in the avalanche?" He smiled ruefully and said aloud:

"No use trying to crawl to the coast."

Los recalled the civil war and his armoured train. . . . There death had been a constant companion and Los had become accustomed to looking it in the face. But here amid these white rocks and unearthly stillness he experienced for the first time the fear of death.

* Boy (Russian).—*Trans.*

"How terribly stupid, confound it. . . . The bearded chief destroyed by the spirits. . . . Ah, Natasha! . . ."

He felt for his pipe and a splintered box of matches, and, lying on his back, began to smoke.

"Los doesn't go under so easy—we've still got some fight!" he shouted out to the skies.

Suddenly he heard the growling of a dog.

"Andre-e-ei!" cried Los.

The dog barked.

Los crawled in the direction of its voice and soon came across a sledge lying buried in the snow. In the sledge lay the huddled figure of Rynteu with a crushed skull. The snow around the sledge was stained with blood. One dog sat in the traces, greedily devouring the blood-stained snow.

Los had seen many dead men during his life at the front but never had a corpse had such a depressing effect upon him as the body of this old man. The end of the reins to which the traces were attached had been bitten through. The whole team with the exception of the shaft dog had evidently run away.

Los untied the dog, fastened the leash to his belt and swiftly crawled away.

He went suddenly cold at the thought that he would next come across Andrei's body. Remembering how the dog had been devouring the bloody snow he said to himself: "No, I won't allow you to feed on my flesh. Before life parts this body I'll kill you."

The dog, as though guessing his thoughts, suddenly bristled and snarled. Los started. At the same instant his keen ears caught a faint sound, as of someone yawning nearby.

Los took off his cap and listened. Not a murmur. Not a sign of life anywhere. The dog strained silently at the leash. Los unfastened it from his belt and

holding the end in his hand let the dog on ahead and crawled after it.

While still at a distance he saw Andrei's head on the snow. The body was buried to the shoulders. Los darted forward and barely had he reached Andrei when he dropped unconscious.

"Nikita Sergeyevich! Seems I fell asleep," said Andrei, opening his eyes.

Releasing one of his arms he touched Los' face and beard.

"Sergeyevich! Why don't you answer?"

Andrei tried to get up. His revolver pressed painfully against his chest. Shovelling the snow away with his one free hand Andrei was soon able to thrust his hand into the wide opening of his fur shirt. He pulled out his revolver. A shot rang out, sending a loud report re-echoing amid the cliffs. When the sound died down Andrei fired two more shots.

"Andrei, who's that shooting..." said Los, coming to.

"Sergeyevich! You're alive?" cried Andrei, overjoyed.

"Looks like it," said Los with a smile. "Mustn't die yet—too many things to do."

"Why are you crawling, Sergeyevich?"

"Something wrong with my leg. Fractured. Wants putting in a splint."

"I'll go and look for the sledge and break off some slats."

"Wait a minute, Andrei, don't go. Wait till the mist clears, or we'll lose each other again."

"Let's have a pick-me-up, Sergeyevich."

Andrei pulled out a big bar of chocolate.

"What rotten luck, Andrei," said Los, breaking off a piece of chocolate. "Right from the start. And that Thompson fellow's been living here over twenty years

and has never had anything happen to him, the darned moneygrubber!"

The mist lifted and revealed the huge cliff with great mounds of snow lying in a chaos at its foot. Nearby could be seen the back of Rynteu's sledge. Andrei got up and went to fetch some fragments for making splints.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

As the time for Mr. Thompson's departure for America drew near things took an uncomfortable turn for him. He received a letter from the Revcom instructing him to bring the balance of his stock of furs to the provincial centre for sale at fixed prices. This arrangement, naturally, pleased him not at all. The fifteen hundred pelts which had remained on his hands as a result of the non-arrival of the schooner Mr. Thompson regarded as his own inalienable property. His arrangements with Alitet for shipping them across to America had long been made, and Mr. Thompson impatiently waited for his coming. Rultyna noticed her husband's restlessness and began to suspect that Charlie was planning mischief.

On meeting Rultyna by the store Charlie spoke to her with unusual amiability.

"Rultyna, the schooners have stopped coming to me. The Russians have forbidden me to trade, but we can't live without products. I shall have to go to America to bring some over."

"You know, Charlie, what you have to do," said Rultyna meekly.

Mr. Thompson was on the point of saying that he

intended to take Ben with him to show him America, but he thought better of it.

He went into the store and examined the bales of furs sewn up in burlap and an old ironbound chest containing his bank documents and cash. He sat down on the chest, lit his pipe and mused: "My whole life's in this chest. It hasn't been wasted. I've managed to save up a pretty sum. It now remains to get away and save this last batch of furs from the Russians."

Suddenly he heard the boys outside shouting:

"Alitet! Alitet!"

Mr. Thompson ran out, and seeing the sail of the whaleboat on the horizon, hurried into his room.

"Rultyna, send the children to me!" he shouted.

The little room was filled with children. They stood around their father's rocking chair in a timid group.

"Come closer, children! Come closer, Ben!" He embraced them and said:

"I am going to America for a short time. Let each of you tell me what he wants for a present. Ask whatever you want, I will bring it."

"Bring some chewing gum, Charlie," said audacious Bertha of the oblique eyes.

"All right, I will bring a whole case of chewing gum. Well, and what do the others want? What shall I bring you, Ben?"

"Bring me a small rifle, a light one. I will shoot the seals from the shore. People say when you kill a seal yourself the meat is very tasty."

Mr. Thompson drew a heavy sigh and said almost in a whisper:

"All right, Ben, all right! I shall bring you a rifle for sure."

Rultyna stood outside the door listening to the talk between the father and her children. Charlie was talking kindly to all of them without discrimination. She had never known him to do so before.

A mist came down and hid the midnight sun. The whaleboat was approaching the shore, and the children ran out to the beach. Mr. Thompson hastened out after them. He greeted Alitet warmly.

"I have been waiting for you a long time, Alitet. I have everything ready. Tell the men to get the fur bags and the chest loaded quickly. They are in the store."

Mr. Thompson glanced at Mr. Simons' trading post, then, after a moment's reflection, went over to see his countryman. It was a long time since he had last seen him!

"Ah! Thompson! I'm delighted!" cried Mr. Simons.

"I'm sorry, Simons, if I've offended you in any way. . . ." he began in embarrassment.

"Not at all, Thompson, not at all!"

"I've decided to take your advice, Simons. I'm going away, going for good. Don't think ill of the old man!"

"That's jolly good, Thompson! I wish you luck. When do you intend leaving?"

"Now, this very minute. Good-bye, Simons."

"Wait a minute! I'll come down and see you off."

"Thanks. You'd better not. Please don't! . . ."

Mr. Thompson went out and made his way swiftly towards the beach. He counted the number of bales, glanced at the chest, then enquired anxiously:

"Where is Ben?"

"You forgot to take your gloves. He ran in to get them," answered Rultyna.

The oarsmen had already taken their places in the whaleboat. Alitet stood at the helm. Mr. Thomp-

son alone was still on the beach waiting impatiently for Ben.

Ben ran up breathless and handed the gloves to his father. Mr. Thompson put them on, swung his leg over the side, then brought it back again. He glanced at Ben and asked:

"Ben, would you like to see walrus hunting?"

The boy's eyes gleamed.

Without waiting for a reply Mr. Thompson lifted Ben and lowered him into the whaleboat. Pushing it off he jumped in after him.

"Charlie, Ben is not wearing his travelling boots!" cried Rultyna.

But the whaleboat had already sheered off. Ben waved his hand and shouted:

"Rultyna, my boots are still good! I will bring you fresh liver!"

"Tumatuge, hoist the sail!" commanded Alitet.

The whaleboat swiftly disappeared into the mist.

Rultyna stood on the beach. Fear for her son gripped her. "Charlie has taken Ben. He has probably taken him for good. My eyes shall never see him again." And Rultyna cried in a voice of despair:

"Ben! Ben!"

She sank on the pebbly beach and gazed long at the mist-shrouded sea. Recollections of her long life came crowding into her mind. She had never spoken with Charlie as other women had spoken with their husbands. It was very hard to live with a white man. But now she would go home and talk to her children in a full voice and not in a whisper as she always did. Her throat had become spoilt through whispering. She peered into the misty distance for another fleeting glimpse of the whaleboat. For Ben was there! A haze of tears suffused her eyes.

She sat for a long time on the beach in the hope that the mist would lift. There was not a soul about. Somewhere in the distance shots rang out. The men would soon bring home fresh sweet meat. There would be a walrus feast.

Bertha ran up to Rultyna and whispered to her to come home.

"You must speak loudly, Bertha," her mother said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The whaleboat steered a course 35° northeast. Mr. Thompson had set that course. Alitet stood at the rudder staring at the compass. Here and there ice floes appeared on the surface of the sea.

Mr. Thompson sat on his ironbound chest. He had one arm around Ben, holding him close as though he feared he would run away. He stared silently back at the shore on which he had spent half of his life, but the shore was hidden in the mist. A dim sense of regret assailed him.

Charles Thompson was now on his way to civilization. How would he fit himself into the noisy bustling life? A sudden fear gripped his heart. He had a terrified impulse to turn the whaleboat back. He would have done so had there not come the sobering thought that there, on the coast, Mr. Los held sway. He glanced at his chest and whispered to Ben:

"This contains all our life, Ben. You and I shall be rich people. To save the capital we shall start a little business of our own. We shall not be in need of anything.

But Ben was not listening to his father. He was peering intently at the surface of the water where now and then a seal would swim up.

Mr. Thompson went over to Alitet on the bow.

"Now the Russki will not be able to walk for a long time. I made a little mistake. I missed the rocks—they dropped on the smooth snow," said Alitet, leaning over to Charlie's ear.

"Alitet, I shall not come back for the winter trade. The Russians will be in my way. They escaped with their lives after all. I shall bring goods on the schooner in summer."

"Very good!" exclaimed Alitet. "Only do not come to Enmakai settlement. Sail to Bird's Beak gorge. No one lives there and no one will see. I shall wait for you there in summer."

The whaleboat ran smoothly, tacking amid the ice floes. Dawn had broken, and with it the rays of the sun struggled here and there through the mist. Alitet was anxious for a glimpse of the coast line. A compass was a good thing, but there was no harm in keeping sight of the cliffs.

"Stop, stop!" Alitet suddenly cried in a loud whisper to the oarsmen. "Look, Charlie, look! There's a walrus lying on the ice!"

Mr. Thompson brought the binoculars to his eyes.

"A big walrus! What huge tusks. I want that head and tusks as a souvenir, Alitet. We must kill him."

"That is a rapacious walrus. When he was a little one and rode on his mother's back she must have been killed and he was left alone. Such a walrus drives all the seals from the coast. We shall soon kill him."

The whaleboat crept noiselessly up to the sleeping beast. Tumatuge laid down his oar, picked up his rifle and crawled over to the bow. Alitet got ready a harpoon and an air bladder.

Ben watched the walrus with bated breath. This was his first experience of walrus hunting. But Ben

knew that a walrus must not be killed outright—it would slide off the ice and sink. It had to be wounded first, harpooned and then shot dead with a bullet in the head. No doubt Tumatuge would now shoot it in the flippers or in the neck.

The oars propelled the whaleboat noiselessly through the water. The only sound was the dripping of the oars.

A shot rang out. The walrus raised its huge tusks, shook its head and plunged into the water before Alitet had time to throw his harpoon.

Everyone kept a tense lookout to warn the thrower on which side the walrus would float up. It did not appear on the surface for a long time.

Suddenly a terrific blow shook the whaleboat's bottom. Three planks were sent flying overboard and the huge tusks of the beast appeared for a second in the hole. The water rushed in. With a shout the men threw themselves upon the hole and began hastily stuffing it up with their parkas. The next instant the head of the walrus rose along the side. It spurted blood and snarled with closed eyes. It hooked its tusks onto the side as though heaving itself onto an ice floe. Tumatuge fired point-blank and in the same instant the whaleboat capsized beneath the weight of the huge body.

Mr. Thompson, snorting like a walrus, struck out for the nearest ice floe. He quickly swam to it and clutching the edge clambered on the ice, pale and dripping, minus his spectacles and with broken fingernails.

"My God!" he gasped, staring frantically about him. "Ben! Ben!"

Thompson shivered and gazed hard in the direction where the whaleboat had gone down. His whole life flashed before him in a single second.

"My God!" He cried again and dropped on the ice.

Alitet's head appeared on the surface of the water bobbing up and down like a corkfloat. He was clutching the air bladder and seemed to be standing neck-high in the water.

Alitet clambered onto another ice floe and began swiftly taking off his clothes.

"Charlie! Undress yourself, shake your clothes out! It will be bad if you don't!" shouted Alitet.

Mr. Thompson with chattering teeth kept repeating:

"My God! My God!"

"Throw off your cloth shirts—they will take a long time drying!" shouted Alitet. He stood naked in his torbazes, shaking out his fur clothes vigorously.

Meanwhile the ice floes on which the two men stood drifted slowly apart. Alitet stretched his parka out with both hands, trying to use it as a sail, but there was no wind. The sea currents carried the ice floes farther and farther apart.

A barrel of fresh water was floating near the ice floe. Alitet shouted:

"Look, Charlie—there's a barrel of water! Watch it!"

The barrel floated close up.

Some fur bales floated past.

By midday Alitet's ice floe had sailed out of sight.

Mr. Thompson shivered with cold. Towards evening he ran a high fever. He was tormented by thirst. He put a piece of ice in his mouth but immediately spat it out. The sickening sweet-salt taste brought on an attack of nausea. Mr. Thompson, utterly spent, pressed a lump of ice to his forehead.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Los was confined to his room in the Revcom. He hobbled on a crutch from his bed to the table and back. Andrei Zhukov was a solicitous nurse.

Since their return to the coast after the cliff accident accompanied by Yarak, Aye and Mary, the latter had been taken into the employ of the Revcom as char-woman. Mary kept the place in perfect order, coming in the morning and leaving late in the evening. Her duties were not many and most of the time she was able to devote to studying Russian and learning to read and write.

Confined as he was to the house Los gladly undertook the duty of teacher. He would usually lie on his bed while Mary squatted on the floor on reindeer skins, spreading her paper on the bench and assiduously tracing out curlicues of the alphabet for all the world as though she were embroidering leather with reindeer wool.

"Fine, Mary!" Los said encouragingly. "If you go on the way you're doing you'll soon learn the whole bag of tricks."

Mary smiled and went on with her labours.

"Mary! Didn't your father ever try to teach you to read and write?"

"No. He said only white people needed to know it. And I am only half white."

Los was nonplussed.

"Yes, but aren't you his daughter?"

Mary was silent.

"Your father will probably go away to America this summer."

"I don't care," Mary answered indifferently.

"Wouldn't you like to go with him?"

"No. I will never leave Yarak. We are going to have a little child. We shall live here. Let Charlie go."

Mary got up and went over to the stove. Her soft embroidered torbazes made no sound. Long black braids hung down her back, swaying as she walked. Her calico dress clung to her waist. Los thought of Natasha and imagined her here, moving about the room and looking after things as Mary was now doing. She would probably come out with the first steamer. "I don't suppose she'll recognize me, in this awful beard..." he thought.

"Mary, give me the mirror, please."

Los took a look at himself and then asked for the scissors. He clipped the beard off and tossed it onto the floor.

Mary stood gaping in amazement.

"Los! What are you doing?" she gasped.

Los smiled, threw Mary a sly nod and got out his razor and soap.

"You want to make your face clean?" asked Mary.

"Yes."

"I know how to do it. Charlie used to make me do it. Let me help you!"

Mary shaved him.

"Why, Los, you have become a boy! And you are not at all terrible any more. People will no longer fear you!" And Mary went into a peal of merry laughter.

"But I do not want people to be afraid of me, Mary. Here, my gums and legs are beginning to swell—that's no good. Not enough exercise. I'm afraid I'll fall ill with scurvy."

"You should eat raw seal's meat," said Mary.

Old Ilyich, ex-Umkatagen, entered the room.

"Where is Los?" he asked Mary.

"There he is," she said, pointing to the bed.

The old man surveyed Los, then turned to Mary and said in a tone of admonition:

"I am not so young to be played jokes with. I have

come on important business. If your youth needs levity seek yourself a younger man, Mary."

"But I am not joking, Ilyich, it is the truth," said Mary, taken aback.

Los, assuming an air of gravity, put in:

"Mary speaks the truth, Ilyich. I am Los. You did not recognize me because I cut my beard off."

The old man looked at him closely.

"I think you are Los," he said at length.

The old man decided that Los had done very wisely in changing his appearance and throwing the evil spirits off the scent while he was ill. The most crafty spirits would now be baffled and mix him up with someone else.

The old man sat down on the edge of the stool and brought out a chunk of seal meat from a bag, saying:

"I have heard that your legs are swelling. You must eat this meat. I shall bring some more after the next hunt."

Los was deeply moved. Tears suddenly started to his eyes.

"Thanks, Ilyich!" he said. The old man departed.

"Now that is what I call a real noble character!" cried Los.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

There was a great stir and bustle on the beach. Harpoons, air bladders, rifles and casks of fresh water were being stowed away in the boats. The air rang with shouts and cries. Men were hastening to the hunt.

Ilyich was already sitting in the bow of his boat and the hunters were jumping in. They were his son Ermen, Yarak, Aye and four other lads. The old man was smiling. So he might. For this was a rare crew of

sturdy youngsters! They needed no wind to speed on this boat.

Yarak and Aye, glad to be back on the coast, seized the oars eagerly. This was real life! Not like running after reindeer in the hills.

"But where's Andrei?" asked the old man.

"There he comes with the primus stove," said Ermen.

The hunters liked to have Zhukov with them. He helped them in various ways, carrying things and dragging the boat ashore, but they liked him most of all for his stories. Despite his youth Andrei could, in the opinion of the hunters, vie in storytelling with the oldest of the sages. He had an inexhaustible fund of interesting tales. The hunters were particularly delighted with his stories about the Russian doctors who cut open the stomach of a living man, messed about inside it as though it were the belly of a walrus, "cut out" the illnesses, then sewed the stomach up with a needle and the man would walk about again as though nothing had happened.

It was a farfetched tale, of course, but still it was very interesting.

Andrei leapt into the boat and it immediately shoved off. Soon the oarsmen had thrown off their garments and, half-naked, bent to the oars with might and main. The oars creaked in the rowlocks and the old man at the rudder cried from time to time:

"Aha-ha! Aha-ha!"

And the boat would shoot forward over the smooth surface. The other boats had been left far behind.

Ilyich kept a keen lookout in front of him. The hunters had full confidence in their helmsman, for they knew that their efforts would not be wasted. The old man was sure to bring them to the walruses.

The boat entered among the ice floes. The old man called a stop and told the hunters to get out onto the ice and have a look around. A little distance aside they

noticed something yellow on an ice floe. They reported it to the old man and the boat immediately pulled out in that direction.

The old man clambered out onto the ice floe, carefully examined it, and said:

"Walruses have been lying here. They were here yesterday. Two walruses—a male and a female."

At noon the boat came upon the walruses. Two large beasts lay peacefully dozing on an ice floe.

A shot rang out followed by a swift throw of the harpoon, and the walrus disappeared into the water dragging the bladder float after it.

Soon the beast, wounded in the neck where the gills are situated, floated to the surface, staining the water crimson.

Three shots rang out in quick succession. The walrus hung limp on the bladder.

"Done for!" shouted the old man.

The hunters dragged the carcass onto the ice, and with faces glowing with excitement, began sharpening their knives on whetstones.

"Andrei, while they are dressing the walrus, you get the primus going. We shall drink tea," said Ilyich.

The walrus was dressed before the kettle had time to boil. The hunters stewed the meat away in the boat, washed their hands and sat down to their tea, highly pleased with their lucky start.

"Drink quickly!" said the old man. "We must look for the other walrus, the male—it cannot be far."

And once more the rowlocks creaked.

"Yarak, ship your oar and keep a lookout. Your eyes are younger," commanded the old man.

The boat tacked amid the ice floes and went farther and farther out to sea. Evening was drawing on.

"A walrus, a walrus!" cried Yarak.

Aye and Ermen seized their rifles and went over

to the bows. Andrei examined the quarry through his binoculars. Just as the hunters were preparing to shoot, Andrei exclaimed:

"Stop! It's a man!"

The hunters lowered their rifles, the oarsmen their oars.

On the ice floe lay Mr. Thompson. His face burned and his breath came in gasps. He opened his eyes and tried to sit up, but his strength failed him.

"Drink," he whispered.

Andrei took his hand and felt his pulse.

"All drowned," said Mr. Thompson. "All over."

Charles Thompson was put into dry clothes and carried into the boat. He was delirious.

The boat sped on swiftly. Mr. Thompson lay motionless on the pile of walrus meat covered with skins.

Andrei touched his forehead, put his ear to his chest, then straightening up he said:

"He is dead.... Make for the shore."

The hunters did not stir. Old Ilyich too sat silent. It was no place for a dead body in a boat. It must be lowered into the sea.

"Ilyich! Charlie was a white man. He must be taken ashore. Nothing bad will come of it. Let us be moving," insisted Andrei.

And the old man put his hand to the rudder.

The news of Charlie's death spread quickly throughout the settlement. The people crowded on the beach. Mary gazed in silence at the body of the man who had been her father. She recollected how Charlie had dragged Yarak out by the leg cursing. And now he lay there with a bloodless face and without the pieces of glass over his eyes. A sudden feeling of terror swept over her. Going up to Ilyich she said:

"He must be buried at once."

"He cannot be laid in our burial grounds. He must be taken to Loren, the place where he lived," said the old man.

When the body of Mr. Thompson was brought back to the place where he had lived for over twenty years Rultyna ran out to the beach.

"Yarak, where is Ben?" she cried without a glance at Charlie.

"He was drowned. They all drowned."

Rultyna sank on the beach. Her legs gave way under her.

"Mary, we must sew him a new parka and carry him to the burial ground, to the rocks," said Rultyna apathetically.

"Rultyna, let Sime bury him in their own way, in the Merican way. We should not take him to our burial ground. Charlie was not a real man," said Mary sadly.

